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THE OPERAS OF WAGNER

The ship of the Flying Dutchman (page 25)

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THE OPERAS OF WAGNER

THEIR PLOTS MUSIC AND HISTORY

by J. CUTHBERT HADDEN

AUTHOR OF "CHOPIN" AND "HAYDN" IN THE
'MASTER MUSICIANS' SERIES

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PREFACE

THIS is frankly and avowedly a book for the musical amateur: for the man or woman who wants to hear a Wagner music-drama, and wants to know, first and chiefly, "what it is all about." Technicalities have been avoided as far as possible, the one aim being to give lovers of opera a clear understanding of the several works in the Wagnerian repertoire, with such facts about their history, about the original sources of their texts, and so on, as seem likely to heighten the listener's interest and appreciation.

Each of the music-dramas dealt with, "Parsifal" excepted, has formed the subject of a separate volume issued by the publishers in a series devoted to the Great Operas. In thus bringing the individual Wagner volumes within one cover, I have tried to eliminate all repetitions and other overlapping matter, and to give the work such unity as is attainable under the circumstances.

My obligations are due, more or less, to all the leading writers on Wagner and his works. They are especially due to my friend Miss J. C. Drysdale,

to whom I owe not only the entire section on "Tannhäuser," but also a wealth of helpful hints and suggestions, a candid criticism, and an unwearied practical interest which it is impossible for me too gratefully to acknowledge.

J. Cuthbert Hadden.

Edinburgh, *April* 1908.

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RICHARD WAGNER

One hesitates about touching a career so Titanic, so epoch-making, so full of vicissitude, and trial, and temptation, of suffering and defeat, in a handbook like this. Yet it is necessary that some outline of biography should be attempted, if the circumstances attending the inception and creation of the several great music-dramas are to be understood and appreciated.

Richard Wagner, the youngest of nine children, was born at Leipzig, May 22, 1813. Significantly, around his cradle was fought the battle of the nations. One hundred and twenty thousand Germans and Frenchmen lay dead or dying in the fields near Leipzig; and the epidemic fever which came stalking abroad to finish the grim work of carnage left the future composer fatherless when only five months old. The widow married again, this time an actor at the Dresden Theatre.

Like Schumann, Wagner ripened late. No musical prodigy was he; yet at seven he could strum a tune on the piano, and his step-father, dying then, hoped that "something worth while might be

made of Richard." Wagner, telling this, adds: "I remember how I long imagined that something would be made of me." Something *was* made of him! But for a long time it was uncertain what would be his life-calling. He thought he would be a poet, and wrote verses on the Greek model. He thought he would be a dramatist, and wrote a portentous play compounded of "Hamlet" and "Lear" and "Titus Andronicus." Forty-two persons were destroyed one after the other before the end; and in order to have any one on the stage, the characters were brought back as ghosts! The art with which his name was to become immortally associated was not much in his mind then. His Latin tutor gave him some piano lessons, but predicted that musically he would "come to nothing." Wagner hated the piano, and, like Berlioz, never could play it well.

His fate was sealed by hearing one of Beethoven's symphonies. "I fell ill of a fever," he says, speaking of this turning point in his life, "and when I recovered, I was—a musician." Not long after, he heard Goethe's "Egmont," with Beethoven's incidental music. His own tremendous tragedy must have incidental music too! And so he decided to be a composer. He took lessons and wrote overtures, one of which he carried to Dorn, conductor of the Royal Theatre at Dresden. It was written in three different coloured inks—red for strings, green for wood-wind, black for brass—and Dorn had it per-

formed. Meanwhile, in 1828, Wagner entered the University of Leipzig, where he gave himself up to all the excesses of student life. Music was temporarily laid aside in favour of classical study. But only temporarily. He took more lessons, and in six months was told by his professor that he had arrived at technical independence.

Compositions of various kinds followed, some of which were performed in Leipzig; but it was not until he read Bulwer's "Rienzi," about 1837, that he did anything worth mentioning. He was married by this time (in 1836)—married miserably, as events proved, and in a sack of debt. His betrothed, Minna Planer (an actress, "pretty as a picture"), had gone as "leading lady" to Königsberg, and Wagner, following her from Magdeburg (where he had been doing routine musical work), was appointed musical director of the theatre there. The wedding followed. "I was in love," he said afterwards, "and I persisted in getting married, thus involving myself and another in unhappiness." After filling another miserable post at a Riga theatre, Wagner came to London (on his way to Paris), with his wife and a big Newfoundland dog, and the two completed acts of "Rienzi." On the voyage (it lasted nearly a month, for there was a terrific storm in the North Sea), the sailors told him the story of the Flying Dutchman, which was to bear fruit later.

Wagner went to Paris, hoping to win fame and fortune; buoyed up by the prospect of having "Rienzi" staged there. Alas! it was the old story over again. The despairing young genius had to slave for bread and butter by the most humiliating musical drudgery—"making arrangements for every imaginable kind of instrument, even the cornet." He wrote articles for a musical paper; wrote even a couple of novelettes! He applied for a post as singer in a small theatre, and was told by the conductor who examined him that he could not sing. And he had been chorus-master at Wurzburg, too! Happily the clouds were breaking. Wagner had confidence in himself, and while he wrote for food he wrote also for fame. He finished "Rienzi," which was presently accepted for Dresden. Then he started on "The Flying Dutchman," and completed that in seven weeks. Paris, he realised, would never do anything for him, and in the spring of 1842 he saw the Rhine, the German Rhine, for the first time, and swore eternal fealty to the Fatherland.

"Rienzi," produced in the October of that year, set him on the road to success. He had obtained the snug berth of conductor at the Dresden Opera, with a salary of £250; and here he remained (having meanwhile, in 1845, produced "Tannhäuser") until the Revolution of 1848. Wagner was, as Liszt said, a born reformer, undaunted by blood or fire.

Nothing would restrain him at this juncture. He made red-hot Republican speeches, and actually fought at the barricades. He was proscribed, of course, and had to fly for his life. A price was put on his head, and he hid himself in Paris. Later, he went to Switzerland, and twelve long years of exile and poverty followed. To his everlasting credit, Liszt never failed to answer his appeals for help. It was, as will be told, in these early days of exile that this loyal friend brought out "Lohengrin" at Weimar. "Artist, I have faith in you," he once said to Wagner, and he proved his faith in the best of all ways—by works.

At last, in 1861, mainly by the intervention of Princess Metternich, Wagner obtained permission to return to Germany. He had been working hard at the great trilogy of the "Ring," but he saw no hope of ever bringing it to completion, as indeed he sadly said when he published the libretto in 1864. But just then Ludwig II., the "mad king," then a youth of nineteen, mounted the throne of Bavaria, and Wagner received from him a handsome villa residence and a substantial allowance besides, thus enabling him to finish his great art work in comfort. The story has often been told, but will bear telling again, how Ludwig sent Adjutant Sauer to seek the composer. Sauer went first to Vienna, and then to Switzerland, without success. In Switzerland, however, he met Baron Hornstein,

the song-composer, who put him on the right track. "I know where Wagner is," said the Baron; "he is at Stuttgart, hiding from his creditors." Such was indeed the case, and according to several biographers, the despairing Wagner was just about to put an end to his life, when the opportune arrival of Ludwig's messenger saved him. Ludwig, he said, writing to a friend, "wants me to be always with him, to work, to rest, and to produce my music-dramas. He will give me all I need. I am to finish the 'Ring,' and everything shall be as I wish." Truly has it been said that Liszt and Ludwig ("mad," as he was) saved Wagner to the world.

"Tristan" was performed under Von Bülow's direction in 1865; three years later, and "Die Meistersinger" was produced. In 1870 occurred another notable event in Wagner's life, for it was then that he married the divorced wife of Bülow,—Cosima, the daughter of Liszt. Poor Minna, separated from Wagner from 1861, had died, isolated, in 1866. Bülow, almost broken-hearted, forgave Wagner and his Cosima, and remained faithful to the music of the future, though he expressed the wish that the man had been another than Wagner, that he might have shot him! The union turned out happily, and Cosima Wagner still (1908) lives, as she has always lived, to promote the fame of her idolised husband.

The culmination of the master's great career was

reached when the gigantic "Ring of the Nibelung" was finished and produced in 1875. "Parsifal," his last work, his musical will, was completed at Palermo in January 1882. In the autumn of that year, Wagner and his family (a son, Siegfried, had been born to him) went to Venice; and there, on the 13th of February 1883, this mighty spirit fled from earth—the most stupendous musical genius of the last half of the nineteenth century. He lies where his faithful dog "Russ" had been laid, in the garden of his own house, Wahnfried, at Bayreuth—that Bayreuth which he declared to be "the art centre of the world."

OPERA, AND WAGNER'S THEORIES OF MUSIC-DRAMA

It is a far cry from the date of the first extant opera to the music-dramas of Richard Wagner. The opera, as regards its essential form, is old enough. The Greeks knew it, and it was probably well established before their time. In the tragedies of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, there was musical recitation, and the choruses were sung in unison. But only a measure or two of this ancient music remains to show what it was like. It is to the age of the Renaissance, with its attempts to revive old-time Greek art, that we owe the first specimens of what we now understand as opera.

There were plays with musical accompaniment as early as 1350. Towards the close of the sixteenth century, too, a society of *literati* was established in Florence, with the purpose of instituting a revival of the Greek art of musical and dramatic declamation. But it was not until 1594 that the first real opera was produced. This was the "Daphne" of Jacopo Peri, a member of the Florentine coterie, who wrote, as he averred, to "test the effect of the kind of melody said to be the same as that used by

the ancient Greeks and Romans throughout their dramas." In Peri's work the recitative was first represented, while it is perhaps worth noting that his orchestra consisted of just four instruments—a harpsichord, a harp, a viol di gamba, and a lute! "Daphne" proved a gigantic success, and the result was a second opera, "Eurydice," produced on the occasion of the marriage of Mary de Medicis with Henry IV. of France, in the year 1600.

Peri's operas were, however, purely tentative efforts. It was reserved for Claudio Monteverde (1566–1650), a Milanese musician, to give a pronounced form to the opera, and to impart to the recitative a more decided character, by endowing it with flow and expression. Monteverde has been enthusiastically described as "the first opera composer by the grace of God, a real musical genius, the father of instrumentation." Like Wagner, he was a musician greatly in advance of his time. The freedom of his melody was generally remarked upon, and the unprecedented licence of his harmonies was vigorously condemned by all his contemporaries. In an opera of 1624 he introduced instrumental effects which were to become of vast importance in opera. Some of these effects were almost Wagnerian in their attempt to convey to the minds of listeners an idea of the feelings animating the several characters. As a discerning critic observes, it gives one something of a shock to find this early seventeenth-

century composer indicating the galloping of horses and the fierceness of their riders, rudely indeed, but with the same musical methods as Wagner employs, with their modern development, in his "Ride of the Valkyries." Monteverde had many competitors in the operatic field, but he easily eclipsed them all, and in a few years gave opera quite a new complexion.

In the opera of "Jason," set by Cavalli and Cicognini for the Venetians in 1649, occur the first *airs* connected in sentiment and spirit with the dialogue. By-and-by the Neapolitan Alessandro Scarlatti (1659–1725) burst on the scene. With him began the real Italian opera, which has held sway for so many years and in so many different countries—the period of *bel canto*, when melody completely gained the upper hand. The singer in a new opera, now and until Wagner's time, was "the chief personage, and the composer soon became merely a servant."

Meanwhile opera was gaining a footing abroad, that is to say, outside Italy. In 1645 it was transplanted to France by Cardinal Mazarin, and was introduced to Germany some thirty years later. Even England rejoiced for a short time in a national opera under her greatest composer, Henry Purcell, who wrote no fewer than thirty-nine works for the stage. When Handel came to London and established himself there, he gave Italian opera a further

fillip, and—landed himself in bankruptcy! He, too, had to write always with the "star" vocalist in view.

And so it was with all the other notable composers of opera until Wagner appeared—with Mozart and Weber, with Meyerbeer and Rossini, with Auber and Boieldieu, with Gounod and Ambroise Thomas, even with Beethoven himself. These, with a host of smaller fry, all wrote, and *had* to write, keeping ever in view the vocal evolutions of the public's favourites. It was Wagner's giant mind which accomplished, successfully and for all time, a reaction against this overgrowth of the melodic element as a piece of vulgar (or at least inartistic) ostentation.

Wagner's theory of opera, or rather of music-drama, as he preferred to call it, was peculiarly and essentially his own. Vast quantities of ink have been shed by innumerable pens in more or less elaborate explanations of that theory. Let it not be supposed, however, that there is anything bewilderingly abstruse about the Master's doctrine of music-drama.

The first thing to understand clearly is that Wagner was dissatisfied with the form and style of the typical Italian opera of his day. It was not a serious art form. It was designed, as I have tried to indicate, chiefly for display—display of voice, and pretty costumes, and graceful action in the love-duets. Text and music had no necessary connection.

The composer's object was to evolve a string of catching melodies; melodies, moreover, which need not arouse any emotion in the listener, but were there simply for showing off the vocal powers of the artistes. The librettos were often so unworthy of musical setting that the French had a saying: "Whatever is too stupid to be spoken may be sung."

Wagner's conception of what opera should be was entirely different. He looked back at the old Greek drama, founded on the great mythological legends of the nation, and marked the tremendous influence it had on the life and thought of the people. He would try to do the same with his own country's myths and legends, so that German opera should be to the Germans what the Greek drama was to the Greeks. As Mr. W. J. Henderson, the author of one of the best books on Wagner in English, has pointed out, it is only by bearing this in mind that we can account for such works as "Lohengrin," "Tannhäuser," and "Parsifal," on the one hand, and the "Ring" on the other. The first three are Wagner's embodiment of the Christian mythology of Germany; the last is his presentation of its old pagan mythology.

Wagner preferred the myth or legend because of its universality, its freedom from the conventions of time and place; because it enshrined human types, fundamental traits of character and elementary emotions. His aim was to throw the whole force

of his musical expression on character and emotion. Text, music, action, scenery—all must unite in a common purpose, each indissoluble from the other. He wrote all his own texts, so that he might know exactly what emotions the music ought to convey. Rubinstein, complaining once that people sent him poems to set to music, added that "they might just as well send me a girl to fall in love with." It was the same conviction which led Wagner to provide his texts for himself. And these texts, let it be observed, are not mere schemes of dialogue, arias, processions, ballets, and what not. They are fine dramatic poems.

This it is, indeed, which constitutes one of the outstanding differences between the old conventional opera and the serious music-drama of Wagner. Wagner sets all the conventions of Italian opera at defiance. He will have no set, detached arias, no duets, quartets, ballets, or ensembles. The acting must not be cramped by the music, as in the old style of opera, where a man may have to stand on one toe till he has done his *roulade*, or pause in the dead of night to shout out a song, "Hush! we shall be discovered," when there is not a moment to spare. With Wagner the music must not be spoiled for the acting, nor the acting for the music. He must have a consistent drama, not a mere musical entertainment cut into lengths, as it were, with breaks for applause, and encores, and so on. His drama

must stand or fall as one piece: the weak as necessary in it as the strong. There must be nothing unrelated to the rest; the music shall be woven, not built.

These are the broad distinctions between the old style of opera and the Wagner music-drama. There are other details, but they are mostly too theoretical for amateur interest and understanding. One special feature of the Wagner music-drama must, however, be adverted to. Wagner, having given up the old aria form, had to invent a new system of repetitions for what has been called his "continuous melody." Hence, all through his works, we have the *leitmotiv*, the "leading motive" or typical theme—a short, striking, and easily recognised musical phrase, associated with some particular character or some special idea or incident in the drama. Whenever Wagner desires to remind his audience of these characters or ideas or incidents, he introduces the appropriate "leading motive," either in the voice or the orchestra, and in many variations according to circumstances. Thus, supposing a special musical phrase or "motive" is heard every time the hero appears on the stage, then, whenever Wagner wants people to know that the heroine is thinking of the hero in his absence, or hears him coming in the distance, the special "motive" occurs in the music. Very likely this consists of only a few notes played by just one kind of instrument

while the rest of the orchestra is busy with elaborate harmonies. Or, again, this particular "motive" may be combined with others, suggestive of other persons, or scenes, or even moods.

Much writing has been devoted to discussions of the *leitmotiv* system. Luckily the subject is too technical for detailed treatment in these pages, though I have sought to illustrate the system in a simple way in dealing with the music of the several dramas. For the rest, it seems enough to insist that by this essential feature of his art Wagner tries to embody the principal mental moods of his dramas —that he uses his "leading motives" whenever he desires to express these moods. It is not really necessary for the hearer to know that there are "leading motives" at all, though an acquaintance with them must of course add to his intellectual pleasure. The important thing is that these "motives" should arouse the emotions which Wagner intended them to arouse. If they do not, then they are useless.

THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DALAND, *Captain of the Norwegian Ship* (*Bass*)
HELMSMAN OF NORWEGIAN SHIP (*Tenor*)
VAN DER DECKEN, THE FLYING DUTCHMAN (*Baritone*)
SENTA, *Daland's Daughter* (*Soprano*)
MARY, *Senta's Nurse* (*Contralto*)
ERIK, *a Forester* (*Tenor*)

Crew of the Norwegian Vessel. Crew of the Flying Dutchman. Village Maidens.

SOURCE OF THE LEGEND

THE legend of the Flying Dutchman is as old as Homer, who showed us Ulysses as an unresting traveller, yearning for home and domestic joys. The Wandering Jew, "accursed and hopeless of all save the end in oblivion," was a later figure of the same type. German mythology embodies the notion in legends widespread and familiar. The Teutonic dead "crossed the water in boats; and northern heroes were sometimes buried on land within their ships, sometimes placed in a ship which was taken out to sea and allowed to drift with the waves." The German Ocean had its own legendary Flying Dutchman in the person of Herr von Falkenberg, who is condemned to beat about the waves until the day of judgment, on board a vessel without helm or steersman, playing at dice with the devil for his soul. Legends with this same central idea are not uncommon. The admitted "mystery chamber" at Glamis Castle has never been satisfactorily explained. But, according to one theory, the fourth Earl of Crawford is confined therein, doomed to play dice till the day of judgment as the penalty of a rash vow. Wagner's Kundry, in

"Parsifal," again, as we shall see later, is the representative of one who was condemned to wander through the world because she had laughed at the suffering Christ on the Cross. Thus do the world's legends synchronise.

The Flying Dutchman was already a very old tale when those daring navigators, the Dutchmen of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, made it peculiarly their own. The Dutch were the old masters of the sea — before Britannia ruled the waves. The sea was their favourite element; and the struggle of the Flying Dutchman against the angry billows "typified their own battles with the powers of old ocean, and their determination to conquer at all hazards." Hence their eager adaptation of the venerable legend, which seems to embody for ever the avenging vision of men who, resolved to win, had so often dared and lost all. Van Straaten was the name of the skipper in the Dutch version of the story. As a penalty for his sins Straaten was condemned to sweep the seas around the Cape of Storms (the Cape of Good Hope) unceasingly, without being able to reach a haven. Seamen were struck with terror when they saw his ghostly ship on the horizon, and, to escape his fatal influence, quickly changed their course.

Wagner first met with the legend when he was a young man struggling with misfortune at Riga. He found it in Heine's fragmentary story, "The

Memoirs of Herr von Schnabelewopski," which is in some sense a sort of autobiographic record. "Heine," says Wagner, "takes occasion to relate the story in speaking of the representation of a play founded thereon, which he had witnessed—as I believe—at Amsterdam. This subject fascinated me, and made an indelible impression upon my fancy; still, it did not as yet acquire the force needful for its rebirth within me." There has been some discussion about the play to which Heine referred. One of Wagner's biographers, the late Dr. Franz Hueffer, very plausibly argues that it must have been a play of Fitzball's which was running at the Adelphi in 1827 when Heine visited London.

He points particularly to the fact that two essential features of Fitzball's play, both absent from the old legend, are referred to by Heine in connection with the drama he saw: namely, the presence of the inscrutable Dutchman's portrait in Daland's house, and the taking of a wife by the unresting seaman. This latter idea—the idea of the fated captain being saved by a woman—was not, however, original with Fitzball. We find it much earlier; though Fitzball certainly seems to have been original in his idea—a grotesque and utterly unpoetical idea—of the Dutchman offering his self-sacrificing bride to a sea-monster!

Fitzball is said to have founded his play (the

play, remember, to which Heine is assumed to refer) on a version of the legend printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* for May 1821. That version ran as follows:

> She was an Amsterdam vessel and sailed from port seventy years ago. Her master's name was Van der Decken. He was a staunch seaman, and would have his own way in spite of the devil. For all that, never a sailor under him had reason to complain; though how it is on board with them nobody knows. The story is this: that in doubling the Cape they were a long day trying to weather the Table Bay. However, the wind headed them, and went against them more and more, and Van der Decken walked the deck, swearing at the wind. Just after sunset a vessel spoke him, asking him if he did not mean to go into the bay that night. Van der Decken replied: 'May I be eternally damned if I do, though I should beat about here till the day of judgment.' And to be sure, he never did go into that bay, for it is believed that he continues to beat about in these seas still, and will do so long enough. This vessel is never seen but with foul weather along with her.

Whether this was Fitzball's original, whether Fitzball's was the actual play which Heine saw, are points of no great importance. Wagner admittedly obtained the germ of his story from Heine.

It is interesting to know how he himself looked at the legend. "The figure of the Flying Dutchman," he writes, "is a mythical creation of the folk. A primal trait of human nature speaks out from it with a heart-enthralling force. This trait, in its most universal meaning, is the longing after rest from amid the storms of life." He goes on to

say how, after the legend had expressed itself in the Ulysses and Wandering Jew forms:

> The sea in its turn became the soil of life; yet no longer the land-locked sea of the Grecian world, but the great ocean that engirdles the earth. The fetters of the older world were broken; the longing of Ulysses, back to home and hearth and wedded life, after feeding on the sufferings of the "never-dying Jew" until it became a yearning for Death, had mounted to the craving for a new, an unknown home, invisible as yet, but dimly boded. This vast-spread feature fronts us in the *mythos* of the "Flying Dutchman," that seaman's poem of the world-historical age of journeys of discovery. Here we light upon a remarkable mixture, a blend, effected by the spirit of the Folk, of the character of Ulysses with that of the Wandering Jew. The Hollandic mariner, in punishment for his temerity, is condemned by the devil (here obviously the element of Flood and Storm) to do battle with the unresting waves to all eternity. Like Ahasuerus, he yearns for his sufferings to be ended by death; the Dutchman, however, may gain this redemption, denied to the undying Jew, at the hands of—a Woman who, of very love, shall sacrifice herself for him. The yearning for death thus spurs him on to seek this Woman; but she is no longer the home-tending Penelope of Ulysses, as courted in the days of old, but the quintessence of Womankind; and yet the still unmanifest, the longed-for, the dreamt-of, the infinitely womanly Woman—let me out with it in one word: *the Woman of the Future.*

Several writers besides Wagner tried to "improve" upon the original legend. Some made an attempt to bring about the conventional happy ending of the average novel. They wanted to release the Dutchman from his fate. Marryat, in his "Phantom Ship," shows one way of doing it when

he introduces an amulet or religious charm. Sir Walter Scott (see "Rokeby," Canto ii. stanza xi.) has another idea—rather a poor one for him. The vessel, in Scott's version of the legend, was laden with precious metal. A murder was committed on board, and a plague broke out among the crew by way of punishment. Perpetual quarantine was the result. Every port was barred against the fateful ship, which was thus doomed to float about aimlessly for ever. As an American critic has pointed out, there is no poetry and there is a total absence of the personal tragedy in this version. Heine's version, which Wagner followed, is in truth the only "happy ending." Let us see how it is reached.

FIRST ACT

THE curtain rises to disclose a rocky cove on a wild and rugged part of the Norwegian coast. A violent storm is raging, and skipper Daland has cast anchor in the shelter. The temporary haven is near his own home, where his daughter Senta is waiting and watching for him. The skipper, hoping for fairer weather, goes below, leaving his steersman to keep watch. Presently, the gloomy vessel of the Flying Dutchman is seen approaching weirdly through the darkness, its blood-red sails piercing the curtain of night. The Dutchman is "that mariner who boasted that his skill would steer him safely in spite of Heaven itself, and who was doomed, because of that blasphemy, to sail the seas for ever." Nothing can free him from the curse but a true woman willing to give her own life for his salvation. The devil has no belief in the virtue of women, and therefore consents to the Captain's going ashore once every seven years for the purpose of taking a wife on trial. Seven years have passed since he last set foot on land. His time has returned, and now he is about to avail himself of his privilege, leaving his ship anchored beside the Norwegian barque.

Meanwhile, he indulges in a gloomy soliloquy. Despair has taken complete possession of him. Hope of mortal aid he has almost entirely abandoned. In a burst of frenzy he prays for death, and pleads for the judgment day to put an end to his wanderings. The crew of the phantom ship echo his piteous wail. At this point Daland issues from his vessel and gives the stranger a cordial greeting. Senta's name is mentioned. Naturally it arrests his attention. What if *this* should prove to be the self-sacrificing maiden he has so long been searching for? Nursing that idea, he tempts Daland by a glimpse of the untold wealth which lies in the coffers of the eerie vessel, amassed during the endless voyage. Daland is something of a miser, and permission to woo Senta is the result of this flaunting of the Dutchman's gold. Meanwhile, the wind has shifted, and the two skippers hasten their departure for the port.

SECOND ACT

Now we are at Daland's home. The old housekeeper and a group of light-hearted, merry-making girls are chattering over their spinning-wheels. Senta sits apart, her eyes dreamily fixed on a mystifying picture on the wall—a portrait of "a pale man clad in black," the legendary Flying Dutchman. "What are you thinking about?" demand the merry-makers,

'Who art thou?' 'Dutchman I'

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Act ii., Finale

in solution of Senta's abstraction. Senta replies by singing the ballad of the ill-fated mariner. Her emotion deepens during the effort, and in a burst of enthusiasm she declares that *she* will be the woman to free the weary wanderer of the main, and find him eternal peace. True, she is already betrothed; and Erik, her lover, enters while she speaks. He reminds her of old vows. But, before she has had time to look seriously at the situation, Daland brings in the Dutchman, and Senta, seeing before her the living embodiment of that mysterious portrait on the wall, falls a helpless victim to the accursed nomad of the deep. Left alone with him, she vows her life to his deliverance, and the curtain falls as the pair are plighting their troth.

THIRD ACT

In this Act we are once more on the seashore, the sailors rejoicing at the harbour. The two vessels of the First Act are again moored side by side. But, while the Norwegian's crew are rioting and feasting, the Dutchman's crew are gloomy and irresponsive. Gay damsels present baskets of food and wine; but no answering appreciation comes from the fated vessel. The Dutchman's ship is silent as the tomb.

Suddenly the visionary sailors appear on the deck

under a supernatural light. They sing a weird song, taunting their skipper with his failure as a lover. The Norwegian sailors, stricken by the uncanny scene, hurry under deck; the giddy girls vanish; and silence once more falls upon the two vessels.

Then Senta appears, accompanied by Erik. Erik pleads his love, but Senta is deaf to his entreaties. Has she not vowed that she will give herself as a sacrifice for the hapless Dutchman? But the Dutchman overhears and misunderstands. He comes forward in great excitement to bid Senta farewell, and to reproach her with having forgotten her promise to him; while Senta at the same time tries to convince him that she still means to be true. He does not wish to undo her, and therefore warns her of the awful punishment of those who break their troth once given to him—death and damnation. She may, he says, still be spared such a fate, inasmuch as she has not yet sworn "before the Eternal One" to be his.

Senta declares that she knows his name and history, and is nevertheless ready to bring him deliverance. But the Dutchman cannot believe in his good fortune, cannot believe that her love will go so far; and proclaiming his baleful name, he rushes on board his ship, which immediately leaves the shore. Senta attempts to follow him, but is held back by her father, Erik, and Mary. Then, breaking from them, she runs to the edge

'Rising heavenwards out of the sea'

of the cliff near by and throws herself into the sea, calling out to the Dutchman—

> Thank thou thine angel with every breath!
> Here see me, true, yea, true till death!

At the same moment the phantom ship sinks with all hands. In the glow of the rising sun, above the wreck, are seen the glorified forms of Senta and the Dutchman, held in each other's embrace, rising heavenwards out of the sea.

The legend thus humanised becomes the vehicle for the expression of those intense yet simple feelings and situations which popular myth, according to Wagner, has the property of condensing into universal types. "Immense unhappiness drawn by magnetic attraction to immense love, tried by heart-rending doubt and uncertainty, and crowned with fidelity and triumphant love, the whole embodied in a clear, simple story, summed up in a few situations of terrible strength and inexorable truth"—such is Wagner's conception of the legend of "The Flying Dutchman."

Here and there, no doubt, his working out is a trifle stagey—for example, in the comings and goings of Daland, and in the Dutchman's anchoring his vessel against the rocks in a tempest: the last thing an experienced seaman would think of doing. A cynical critic imagines in this latter

connection, that Wagner was too sea-sick to observe what happened during his week of roughing it in the North Sea! On the other hand, the dramatic characterisation is not unworthy of the later and more developed Wagner. The figures of the Dutchman and of Senta (dreamful and devoted) are living figures, and one would not willingly have missed them—the latter especially—from the Wagner portrait-gallery.

THE HISTORY

It was his stormy voyage to London in 1839 that set Wagner's thoughts on the operatic possibilities of "The Flying Dutchman" legend, with which, as previously told, he was already acquainted. He had sailed from Pillau, a port on the Baltic, and the voyage was rich in disasters. "Three times," he says, "we suffered from the effects of heavy storms. The passage through the Narrows made a wondrous impression on my fancy. The legend of the Flying Dutchman was confirmed by the sailors, and the circumstances gave it a distinct and characteristic colour in my mind."

Shortly before this, "Rienzi" had been finished and laid aside, waiting for a manager who would produce it. From London Wagner now proceeded to Paris, as set forth in the biographical sketch. Presently he moved to Meudon; and there, in the spring of 1841, "The Flying Dutchman" was composed—all except the Overture—in seven weeks. The composer had shown a first sketch of the libretto to M. Pillet, the director of the Paris Opera, who liked it so well that he suggested having it translated into French and set to music

by a French composer. Wagner's poverty compelled a reluctant assent. He parted with his sketch for a trifle, and a forgotten musician named Dietsch used it, only to have his production fail completely when it was staged in 1842.

Meanwhile, Wagner had written his own music; and, in that connection, the following little bit of autobiography seems in place here:

> I had now to work post-haste to clothe my own subject with German verses. In order to set about its composition I required to hire a pianoforte; for, after nine months' interruption of all musical production, I had to try to surround myself with the needful preliminary of a musical atmosphere. As soon as the piano had arrived, my heart beat fast for very fear; I dreaded to discover that I had ceased to be a musician. I began first with the "Sailors' Chorus" and the "Spinning Song." Everything sped along as on wings, and I shouted for joy as I felt within me that I was still a musician.

The opera finished, Paris would have nothing to do with it, any more than with "Rienzi." Wagner resolved to beat a retreat and try his own countrymen. Munich and Leipzig both declined the new work as "unfit for Germany." Finally, Dresden accepted "Rienzi," and that proving a success, Dresden accepted also the "Dutchman," which was first performed at the Royal Saxon Court Theatre there on January 2, 1843. The Dresden musical public were, unfortunately, not yet ready for so sincere an attempt to make a good

play and to express its feelings in music—in other words, to make the drama assert itself as well as the music, and both to help one another. The "Dutchman's" reception was accordingly lukewarm and hesitating. The famous Mme. Schroeder-Devrient made a great impression as Senta (Schumann declared it was the most original presentation of a character she had ever given); but the public were as yet unworthy of the work. It was too serious for them, accustomed as they were to "glittering processions, splendid scenery and groupings, and imposing action coupled with brilliant music."

Nor was Dresden alone in its apathy. Ludwig Spohr, the great violinist and composer, produced the opera at Cassel in the summer of 1843; and it was staged at Berlin in 1844. But in all cases it failed to win the popular favour. Dresden would not listen to it until twenty years after the initial performance, and it was ten years after the Berlin production before it was heard anywhere. Wagner and his friends were dismayed. "I was in sufficiently ill humour to remain silent and leave 'The Flying Dutchman' undefended," says the composer. Gradually he realised that he must look elsewhere than to the general public for encouragement in his plan of making opera something more than a display of voices and scenery and pretty dresses.

In his frequently quoted "Communication to My Friends" he writes:

> From Berlin, where I was entirely unknown, I received from two utter strangers, who had been attracted towards me by the impression which "The Flying Dutchman" had produced on them, the first complete satisfaction which I had been permitted to enjoy, with the invitation to continue in the particular direction I had marked out. From this moment I lost more and more from sight the veritable public. The opinion of a few intelligent men took the place in my mind of the opinion of the masses, which can never be wholly apprehended, although it had been the object of my labour in my first attempts, when my eyes were not yet open to the light.

The first performance of "The Flying Dutchman" in England was at Drury Lane in July 1870. This was an Italian version, under the title of "L'Olandese Dannato." Signor Arditi, the composer of the celebrated "Il Bacio," was then the conductor at Drury Lane, and he has told all about the event in his Reminiscences.

"Mignon" and the "Dutchman" made the two novelties of the season; and the production of "Mignon" came first. Ambroise Thomas, the composer, was delighted with the result. On hearing that the "Dutchman" was to follow immediately upon "Mignon," he exclaimed, "Good heavens! Arditi, you don't mean to say that you are going to do 'The Flying Dutchman' so soon after 'Mignon'! How will you manage it in such an incredibly short time?"

Arditi managed it, and with eminent success. He had the advantage of a splendid orchestra, including, as leader, no less a personage and virtuoso than Ludwig Strauss; and with such excellent men it was not difficult to accomplish a huge amount of work in a comparatively short time. The first performance in England of an opera by Wagner—a composer who had so long been the object of heated discussion and bigoted, almost wilful misconception—was an event of special interest. For twenty years Wagner had been agitating the world of music by strong denunciations of operatic precedents, and by his endeavours to practically illustrate his theories; hence any new work of his was eagerly anticipated by all musical enthusiasts.

"L'Olandese Dannato" came to the English public as a surprise—a pleasant surprise. "The house," writes Arditi, "was well filled, the musical connoisseurs and professors of the metropolis being in noteworthy preponderance; and, despite the terrific heat, those who came at the beginning to scoff remained to the end to applaud with enthusiasm. I remember the surprise of myself and of Strauss when the Overture was vociferously encored. . . . No one who heard that weird, storm-tossed music for the first time will forget the impression made upon them by the passionate singing of Mdlle. de Murska, Signor Perditi, Mr. Santley, and Signor Foli."

Some of the critics were as bitter in their condemnation of the opera as others were strong in their defence of it; but, generally speaking, the "Dutchman" produced a much better effect than was anticipated. Subsequent performances were sparsely attended. But this was easily explained by the declaration of war between France and Germany, which recalled thousands of German residents in London to the Fatherland, and cast a gloom over every kind of amusement.

The first production in English was by the Carl Rosa Company, at the London Lyceum in 1876. With Santley in the *title-rôle*, the opera made a tremendous hit. Coming on the top of the success of "Lohengrin" and "Tannhäuser" (the latter had been produced in Italian at Covent Garden just four months before), it helped to complete the foundation for that appreciation and understanding of Wagner's works which now extend through all music-loving lands.

THE MUSIC

In listening to "The Flying Dutchman," we do not need to trouble ourselves much about Wagner's essential art theories as these were developed later in "Tannhäuser" and its successors. It is true that, unlike its predecessor, "Rienzi"—an opera in the old sense of the term—"The Flying Dutchman" was definitely a music-drama. Wagner had already revolted against the conventional stage characters who advanced to the footlights and poured out roulades at the audience. He must now have his characters "move, act, and sing in a way that suited the situation, according to the laws of ordinary common-sense." He describes his method in connection especially with the "Dutchman." Thus:

> The modern division into arias, duets, finales, and so on, I had at once to give up, and in their stead narrate the Saga in one breath, just as should be done in a good poem. In this wise I brought forth an opera, of which, now that it has been performed, I cannot conceive how it could have pleased. For in its every external feature it is so completely unlike that which one now calls opera, that I see indeed how much I demanded of the public, namely, that they should with one blow dissever themselves from all that which had hitherto entertained and appealed to them in the theatre.

It was not quite such a severance as that, as Wagner himself, in another place, admitted. He admitted that (as regards the poetical form at least) his "Dutchman" was by no means "a fixed and finished entity." On the contrary, he asked his friends to take it as showing himself in the process of "becoming." He added, however, that the form of the "Dutchman," as of all his later poems, down to even the minutiæ of their musical setting, was "dictated to me by the subject matter alone, insomuch as that had become absorbed into a definite colouring of my life, and in so far as I had gained by practice and experience on my own adopted path any general aptitude for artistic construction."

For all this, Wagner did not, in "The Flying Dutchman," entirely abandon the traditional forms of the Italian singing-opera. For here are solos, duets, choruses, &c., just as in other operas of the time. Not yet, moreover, was he entirely possessed by the *leitmotiv* or guiding-theme system which later became the characteristic feature of his works, though the germ of the system is certainly embedded in the score.

In "The Flying Dutchman" Wagner is only feeling his way towards this essential principle of his art. Hence the work (its unity somewhat impaired on that account) is half old style, half new, with, on the whole, the balance in favour of the old. Spohr summed it up very well when he wrote,

apropos of that early performance under his direction at Cassel:

This work, though it comes near the boundary of the new romantic school *à la Berlioz*, and is giving me unheard-of trouble with its immense difficulties, yet interests me in the highest degree since it is obviously the product of pure inspiration, and does not, like so much of our modern operatic music, betray in every bar the striving to make a sensation or to please. There is much creative imagination in it; its invention is thoroughly noble, and it is well written for the voices, while the orchestral part, though enormously difficult, and somewhat overladen, is rich in new effects and will certainly, in our large theatre, be perfectly clear and intelligible.

Even better, perhaps, is Mr. Henderson's estimate in his introduction to the Schirmer vocal score of the drama. He says:

Wagner divined clearly the necessity of subordinating mere pictorial movement to the play of emotion, and it will easily be discerned that the three acts of "The Flying Dutchman" reduce themselves to a few broad emotional episodes. In the first our attention is centred upon the longing of the Dutchman, and in the second upon the love of Senta. In the third we have the inevitable and hopeless struggle of the passion of Erik against Senta's love. All music not designed to embody these broad emotional states is scenic, such as the storm music and choruses of the sailors and the women.

Coming to details of the music, we have first of all to consider the Overture, a piece so familiar in the concert-room that it may be worth while summarising Wagner's own description of it, long as even a summary must be. The summary repeats,

to a great extent, the outline already given of the several Acts, but that will only further impress the story upon the mind of the listener. Here, then, is Wagner's explanation of the poetical purport of this very fine piece of orchestral writing:

Driven along by the fury of the gale, the terrible ship of the "Flying Dutchman" approaches the shore, and reaches the land, where its captain has been promised he shall one day find salvation and deliverance; we hear the compassionate tones of this saving promise, which affect us like prayers and lamentations. Gloomy in appearance and bereft of hope, the doomed man is listening to them also; weary, and longing for death, he paces the strand; while his crew, worn out and tired of life, are silently employed in "making all taut" on board. How often has he, ill-fated, already gone through the same scene! How often has he steered his ship o'er ocean's billows to the inhabited shores, on which, at each seven years' truce, he has been permitted to land! How many times has he fancied that he has reached the limit of his torments, and, alas! how repeatedly has he, terribly undeceived, been obliged to betake himself again to his wild wanderings at sea! In order that he may secure release by death, he has made common cause in his anguish with the floods and tempests against himself; his ship he has driven into the gaping gulf of the billows, yet the gulf has not swallowed it up; through the surf of the breakers he has steered it upon the rocks, yet the rocks have not broken it in pieces. All the terrible dangers of the sea, at which he once laughed in his wild eagerness for energetic action, now mock at him. They do him no injury; under a curse he is doomed to wander o'er ocean's wastes, for ever in quest of treasures which fail to re-animate him, and without finding that which alone can redeem him! Swiftly a smart-looking ship sails by him; he hears the jovial familiar song of its crew, as, returning from a voyage, they make jolly on their nearing home. Enraged at their merry humour, he gives chase, and coming up with them in the gale,

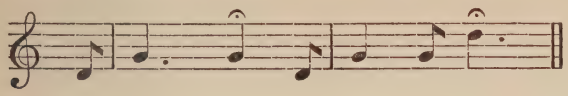
so scares and terrifies them, that they become mute in their fright, and take to flight. From the depth of his terrible misery he shrieks out for redemption; in his horrible banishment from mankind it is a woman that alone can bring him salvation. Where and in what country tarries his deliverer? Where is there a feeling heart to sympathise with his woes? Where is she who will not turn away from him in horror and fright, like those cowardly fellows who in their terror hold up the cross at his approach! A lurid light now breaks through the darkness; like lightning it pierces his tortured soul. It vanishes, and again beams forth; keeping his eye upon this guiding star, the sailor steers towards it, o'er waves and floods. What is it that so powerfully attracts him, but the gaze of a woman, which, full of sublime sadness and divine sympathy, is drawn towards him! A heart has opened its lowest depths to the awful sorrows of this ill-fated one; it cannot but sacrifice itself for his sake, and breaking in sympathy for him, annihilate itself in his woes. The unhappy one is overwhelmed at this divine appearance; his ship is broken in pieces and swallowed up in the gulf of the billows; but he, saved and exalted, emerges from the waves, with his victorious deliverer at his side, and ascends to heaven, led by the rescuing hand of sublimest love.

Thus is this fresh and picturesque composition, this magic and tempestuous "foreword" to a great drama outlined by its composer.

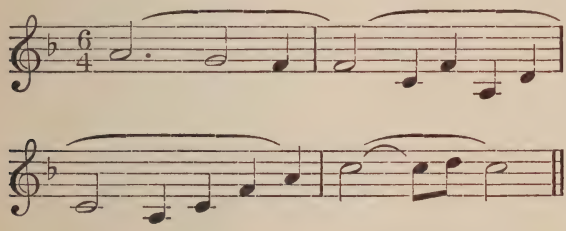
The Overture thus disposed of, one can only note briefly the general musical characteristics of the opera itself. Commonplaces and conventionalities there are in it; but the score contains many passages of persuasive beauty and many points of vital dramatic force. Wagner was always happily inspired by the sea, and the music of the First Act could not be more picturesquely and originally weird. Indeed it may

be said that the atmosphere of the Northern Sea breathes throughout, from the Overture to the Sailors' Chorus in the last Act. This has often been remarked as especially notable in a man born and living for the greater part of his days hundreds of miles away from the sea. No one can fail to be struck with the ghostly music which accompanies the various entries of the demon ship. "The shrilling of the north wind, the roaring of the waves, the breaking of cordage, the banging of booms, an uncanny sound in a dismal night at sea"—these are all suggested with the most vivid realism. The pilot's song is excellent, and the stormy "Ho! e Ho!" chorus is in a popular, rhythmical, melodic style.

The Spinning Song, one of the most popular numbers, is a purely lyric composition, a real "home-melody." Its drowsy hum is exactly what is required to put the listener in the mood for sympathising with Senta and her dreams. The Sailors' Choruses are all bright and tuneful. Senta's ballad in the second act is written in a plain-song form, yet is intensely dramatic in its expression. I have indicated that in "The Flying Dutchman" only the germ of the *leitmotiv* system is to be found. There are, in fact, only two principal guiding themes in the whole drama, and both are heard in this ballad. The first is a sombre phrase expressive of the eternal unrest of the Dutchman—



The second is a tender melody intended to portray the "salvation principle" which animates the self-sacrificing Senta—



Here, again, Wagner himself may be quoted with illuminative interest. Speaking of Senta's ballad, he says:

In this piece I unconsciously laid the thematic germ of the whole music of the opera: it was the picture *in petto* of the whole drama such as it stood before my soul; and when I was about to betitle the finished work, I felt strongly tempted to call it a "dramatic ballad." In the eventual composition of the music the thematic picture, thus evoked, spread itself quite instinctively over the whole drama as one continuous tissue. I had only without further initiative to take the various thematic germs included in the ballad and develop them to their legitimate conclusions, and I had all the chief moods of this poem, quite of themselves, in definite shapes before me. I should have had stubbornly to follow the example of the self-willed opera-composer had I chosen to invent a fresh motive for each recurrence of one and the same mood in different senses; a

course whereto I naturally did not feel the smallest inclination, since I had only in mind the most intelligible portrayal of the subject-matter and not a mere conglomerate of operatic numbers.

The Third Act is, musically, perhaps the least satisfactory as a whole. Here "the paucity of the material forced Wagner to spin his web very thin indeed." The contrasted choruses of joyous wedding guests and phantom wanderers on the waves are, no doubt, somewhat theatrical, though one generous critic has declared that they bear the hall-mark of genius. At any rate, the Act ends effectively; and the intelligent listener comes away feeling that it was worth while hearing "The Flying Dutchman" at once for its intrinsic merits and as a medium for a study of the embryonic Wagner. It shows the development of his musical style—marks the transition period in his career.

TANNHÄUSER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

VENUS (*Soprano*)
TANNHÄUSER, *Minstrel Knight* (*Tenor*)
A Young Shepherd (*Soprano*)
HERMANN, *Landgrave of Thuringia* (*Bass*)
WALTHER VON DER VOGELWEIDE (*Tenor*)
BITEROLF (*Bass*)
WOLFRAM VON ESCHINBACH (*Baritone*)
HEINRICH DER SCHREIBER (*Tenor*)
REINMAR VON ZWETER (*Bass*)
} *Minstrel Knights*
ELISABETH, *Niece of the Landgrave* (*Soprano*)
Four Noble Pages (*Soprano and Alto*)

Chorus of Thuringian Nobles and Knights, Ladies, Elder and Younger Pilgrims, and Sirens, Naïads, Nymphs, and Bacchantes.

ACT I.—The interior of the Hörselberg, near Eisenach; a valley before the Wartburg.
ACT II.—The Wartburg.
ACT III.—Valley before the Wartburg.
PERIOD—Beginning of the thirteenth century.

FIRST ACT

When the gods and goddesses fled from Olympus before the advance of Christianity, Venus, retiring to the North, established her court beneath the hill of Hörselberg, in Thuringia.

The opera opens in the hill of Venus, whither Tannhäuser, the minstrel knight, has fled from the troubles of earth. Here the goddess holds her court amid everlasting revels, luring the souls of men to destruction. The stage represents the interior of the Venusberg. In the background there is a lake in which naïads are bathing, while sirens recline on its banks. On the left of the foreground Venus lies on a couch, with Tannhäuser in a half kneeling attitude before her, his head sunk on her knees. In the centre of the stage nymphs are dancing; these are joined by others from the background in the course of the scene, while now and again a chorus of sirens is heard singing the most seductive strains. A rosy light illuminates the whole cave. When the dance is at its height a mist descends, hiding all but Tannhäuser and Venus.

Tannhäuser has passed an entire year in the grotto in a ceaseless orgy of sinful pleasure; he has

grown weary of his amorous captivity, and longs for the world above, with its mingled joys and sorrows. He begs the goddess to release him; she, in turn, pleads with him to remain, calling up new scenes of ravishing delight. He again implores her to let him go. After a long struggle he finally regains his liberty by calling on the Virgin Mary, when Venus, with a cry, vanishes, and the entire grotto sinks into the earth with a terrible crash.

When Tannhäuser, who has not changed his position, comes to his senses, he finds himself kneeling upon the grass in a beautiful valley between the Wartburg and the Hörselberg, listening to the tinkling bells of the flock and the piping of a shepherd from a rock above. It is a fresh spring morning, bright with sunshine and blue sky. At the back of the stage is the Wartburg; through an opening in the valley the Hörselberg is seen; while in the foreground on the right is a shrine of the Virgin on a small eminence.

The chant of pilgrims passing on their way to Rome awakens Tannhäuser to a sense of his sin. With deep emotion he breathes a prayer of gratitude at being restored to liberty, and vows to expiate his guilt by a life of abstinence and humiliation. The chant dies away in the distance, while the sound of hunting bugles comes nearer and nearer from the heights. Presently the Landgrave of Thuringia, Tannhäuser's liege lord, with Wolfram von Eschin-

Tannhäuser at the Shrine of the Virgin

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bach, Walther von der Vogelweide, and other minstrel knights from the Wartburg, all in hunting array, are seen to descend from a forest path. They greet their old comrade joyfully, ask him whence he has come, and entreat him to return with them to the castle. Tannhäuser replies that he has wandered "in strange and distant lands," where neither peace nor rest were found; that he is at enmity with none, yet they must allow him to depart, as he may never again be one of them. They offer him rest and home with friends, but continue to receive the same answer, till Wolfram mentions the name of the Landgrave's niece Elisabeth, and tells how the saintly maiden has drooped and pined since Tannhäuser disappeared from the singing contests at the Wartburg. Tannhäuser is deeply touched; he passionately embraces Wolfram and the minstrels, and agrees to join them once more. While the whole hunting retinue of the Landgrave assemble on the stage, the knights express their delight at Tannhäuser's return. The Landgrave sounds his bugle, and amidst general rejoicing all hasten away to the castle, and the curtain falls.

SECOND ACT

In the Second Act we are at the Wartburg, in the Hall of Song, prepared for one of those minstrel tournaments for which this castle was celebrated in

the Middle Ages. Elisabeth enters, singing a greeting to the Hall, which she has not seen since Tannhäuser's mysterious disappearance. As her song ends, Tannhäuser is led in by Wolfram, and falls at her feet. The Princess begs him to rise, as it is not fit that he who was wont to conquer in that Hall should kneel thus. Asking him where he has tarried so long, she receives the same answer as the Landgrave: "In strange and distant lands." The pure-minded maid does not dream there is any dishonour in his absence, and gladly welcomes him back to her heart. While they sing an impassioned duet, Wolfram, who remains in the background during this interview, reveals, unheard by the lovers, his devotion to the Princess and the hopelessness of his love now that Tannhäuser has returned. In a transport of joy at their reunion, Tannhäuser parts from Elisabeth, and immediately disappears with Wolfram. Elisabeth gazes after Tannhäuser for some time and then turns to greet the Landgrave, who rejoices to find that his niece will once more grace the tourney with her presence. He questions her as to what has drawn her from her solitude, but when she tells him he must read the answer in her eyes, he does not press her to divulge her secret.

Now the guests assemble. They are received by the Landgrave and Elisabeth, and marshalled to their places to the strains of the famous march, to which their voices presently add a chorus in honour

of the Hall of Song and the Prince of Thuringia. Last of all come the minstrels, who make a stately obeisance to the assembly and are conducted to their seats by pages. The Landgrave, addressing the minstrels, eulogises their services to the Fatherland, and announces that the tourney is held to celebrate the return of Tannhäuser. He suggests "the nature and praise of Love" as the theme of their song, the reward to be whatever the victor may ask from the Princess, who shall bestow the prize.

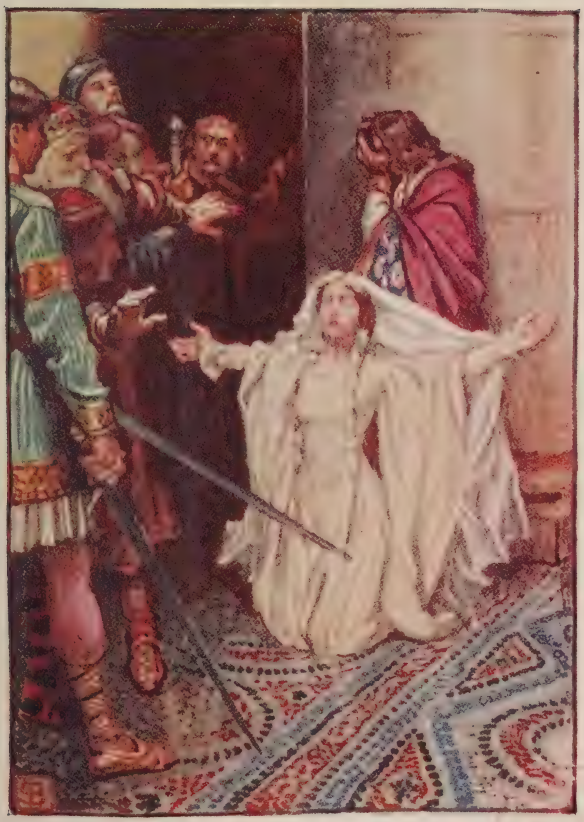
The singers take their harps and pour forth their improvisations. Wolfram, on whom the lot falls to begin, sings of the chaste ideal worshipped by him "Kneeling with soul devoted"; Walther eulogises the pure fountain of virtue, the source of his inspiration; and Biterolf extols the chivalrous passion of the warrior. Tannhäuser at first leans dreamily upon his harp, but towards the end of Wolfram's song he starts from his reverie, and interrupts each singer in turn, scoffing at their cold raptures, which recall to him by way of contrast the amorous delights of the Venusberg. He gradually becomes more excited, till a sort of madness seems to take possession of him, and finally he bursts out into a wild pæan in praise of Venus herself. All are horror-stricken. The women rush from the Hall; but Elisabeth, who has heard the contest with growing alarm, remains, pale and trembling, supporting herself against one of the pillars of the royal canopy.

Tannhäuser stands as in a trance. Then, as the men close round him with drawn swords, Elisabeth throws herself between them and her lover, pleading for his life in the name of the Saviour who died for all. The discovery of his unworthiness has dealt Elisabeth a fatal blow; nevertheless she forgives him and prays earnestly that the hope of pardon may not be denied him. The knights yield to her entreaties and let fall their weapons.

At length Tannhäuser seems to awaken from his trance, and realising his awful crime and all that he has lost, he falls to the ground in abject repentance. When he finds words for his emotions, and while the knights are declaring their obedience to the voice of Heaven, as revealed through Elisabeth, the heavenly maid, Tannhäuser sings the lines in which lies the whole significance of the catastrophe of Tannhäuser, the keynote of the work—

> From doom of wrath to save the sinner,
> An angel from on high was sent.
> But ah! profanely here to win her,
> I would have dared with mad intent!
> Oh, Thou, throning above our mortal frailty,
> Thou who hast sent this guardian saint to me!
> Have mercy, Thou, I cry to Thee despairing!
> Oh, from the gulf of error set me free!

The Landgrave pronounces him accursed, banishes him from the land, and bids him seek the sacred shrine at Rome, where alone he may find



Elizabeth pleads for Tannhäuser

pardon. A band of pilgrims from every part of the Landgrave's domain are on their way to the Eternal City. The elders passed through the valley in the morning; the younger men are even now at hand; and their chant is presently heard sounding from below. In listening to it all have relaxed their threatening gestures and assumed a more softened expression. Tannhäuser, whose features are brightened by a ray of sudden hope, turns in the direction from which the sounds proceed, and rushes from the Hall, crying, "To Rome, to Rome!"

THIRD ACT

The curtain rises in the valley beneath the Wartburg, as in the First Act, but the hopeful beauty of the spring has given place to the sombre loveliness of autumn and the sun has nearly set. On an eminence to the right Elisabeth is kneeling before the shrine in prayer. Wolfram descends from a forest path on the left and stops when he sees Elisabeth. He is a man of noble and devoted nature; and though he himself loves Elisabeth in vain, he hopefully awaits with her the return of the pilgrims, praying that her lost lover may be restored to her, free and forgiven. Presently the pilgrims' chant, telling of pardon gained, is heard in the valley. Elisabeth rises, and as they file past

her one by one she eagerly scans their faces. Alas! Tannhäuser is not among them. She falls on her knees once more, and convinced that all hope of his return must be abandoned, she prays to the Virgin to receive her soul, and to have mercy on him whom she has loved and waited for on earth. Feeling the hand of death upon her, she slowly wends her way back to the castle after bidding Wolfram a silent farewell. Alone in the gathering gloom, Wolfram sings his beautiful address to the evening star, shining brightly overhead.

It is now quite dark, and just as the last strains die away, a figure enters in a ragged pilgrim's dress, pale and worn. He comes forward with faltering steps, leaning on his staff. It is Tannhäuser, returning from Rome, disappointed and despairing. Absolution, he tells Wolfram, has been denied. Yet, accursed though he be, there is nothing to fear from him. He is only trying to find the path to the Venusberg. Wolfram remonstrates with him, and draws out the story of his pilgrimage and its result. Tannhäuser has been to Rome, but the journey has availed him nothing. He has seen the Pope, who pardoned thousands on the same day, yet declared that for his sin there was no hope of forgiveness till the staff which he held in his hand should put forth leaves and blossom. With this terrible message ringing in his ears, Tannhäuser turned his back on the city, resolving

Tannhäuser is allured back to Venusberg

The Pope's Staff puts forth leaves

to retrace his steps northward, and return to the embraces of Venus. Spurned and accursed by all, he has had enough of earth, and there is naught left to him but the joys of the Venusberg.

Wolfram tries in vain to dissuade him from his purpose. In response to Tannhäuser's cries, Venus appears in the midst of her nymphs and sirens, and bids him welcome. Wolfram continues to plead, but Tannhäuser will not yield; and he is on the point of flying to the arms of the goddess, when Wolfram adjures him to resist the evil one by the sacred name of Elisabeth. At the sound of that name Venus and her nymphs sink with a wild shriek into the earth; and Tannhäuser, who has just released himself from the struggle with Wolfram, remains rooted to the spot. The morning breaks, and now is heard the solemn hymn of the procession bearing the corpse of Elisabeth preceded by the elder pilgrims. As the bier is carried forward, Tannhäuser falls lifeless by its side, while a band of young pilgrims appear on a height in the foreground bearing the Pope's staff, which has put forth leaves and blossomed—a sign that the sinner has been pardoned and redeemed. Sunlight streams over the scene, and the minstrels and elder pilgrims join the younger band in singing the triumphal hymn—

> The Lord Himself now thy bondage hath riven;
> Go, enter in with the blest to His heaven.

Tannhäuser, as thus presented by Wagner, is a type of manhood "in its passionate desires and ideal aspirations." As the heroes of Greek tragedy were shattered on the rock of inexorable Fate, so the strength of Tannhäuser is broken in its vacillation between sensual delight and spiritual aims, typified by the Venus and the Elisabeth of the drama. The idea of man's salvation through the love of pure woman, which Wagner had already introduced in "The Flying Dutchman," is common to the folk-lore of many countries. It is the fundamental idea of the greatest poems and dramas of Germany. It is Goethe's last word in "Faust"—

> The Woman Soul
> Leadeth us upward.

So salvation comes to Tannhäuser through the self-sacrificing love of Elisabeth. In a sentence the plot of "Tannhäuser" is the story, which never grows old, of the struggle between good and evil for a human soul, and the sinner's redemption through the power of a pure woman's love.

THE MUSIC

"TANNHÄUSER" belongs to Wagner's second or transition period. He had not yet satisfactorily solved the problem he had set himself. Starting with the theory that opera is primarily a form of drama, and only secondarily a form of music, it was some time before he arrived at the best method of carrying out the idea. "The Flying Dutchman," "Tannhäuser," and "Lohengrin" were experiments in this direction, and it was only after the composition of "Lohengrin" that he saw his way clear to the end he had in view.

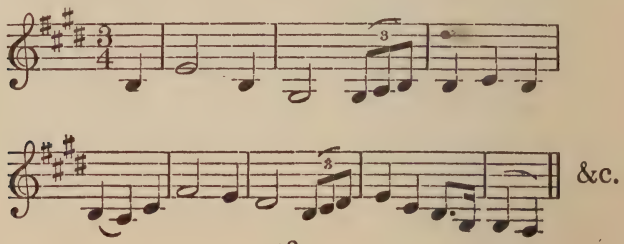
The functional use of the *leitmotiv*, first introduced by Wagner in "The Flying Dutchman," appears with much greater boldness and effect in "Tannhäuser." For example, in the Overture the opening hymn of the pilgrims and the wild rhythms of the Venusberg represent respectively the good and evil principles throughout the work. Again and again they recur in conflict, and in the last scene the good finally triumphs in the magnificent finale.

Though in parts conventional and even commonplace, this opera, as a whole, was a considerable advance upon "The Flying Dutchman," and an important step towards the true music-drama. Com-

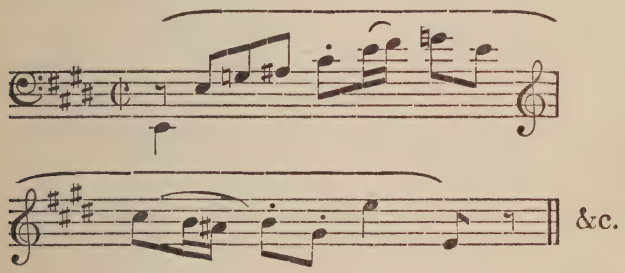
pared with "Lohengrin," the technique in "Tannhäuser" is weak; yet in the latter we do find the beginning of Wagner's third period, especially in Tannhäuser's narrative in the Third Act, and in the last struggle with Wolfram. The music generally is picturesque and effective, and the characters are individualised with wonderful power. Above all there is a notable improvement in the handling of the orchestra. Here for the first time Wagner associates a certain instrument or class of instruments with one of the characters; as, for example, the trombones with the pilgrims, and the wood-wind with Elisabeth. Here, too, the orchestra begins to acquire some of the functions of the Greek chorus. To a large extent it is the expositor of the drama, and expresses what is beyond the capacity of the personages to utter.

The Overture is a masterpiece. It is the longest operatic prelude ever written, and one of the finest. An epitome of the drama, it foreshadows the struggle between good and evil, and the final victory of good.

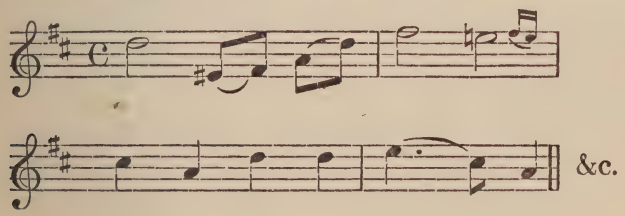
First of all we hear the pilgrims' chant alone, representing the good principle:



It seems to sound from afar, then draws near, getting louder. When at its loudest a figure suggestive of the Venusberg influence asserts itself and accompanies the hymn for a time, then disappears, leaving the religious strain to grow fainter and finally pass away in the distance, as the night falls. Now magic sights and sounds fill the air, a rosy mist floats before us, we hear exultant shouts and see a voluptuous dance—the seductive spells of the Venusberg representing the evil principle:

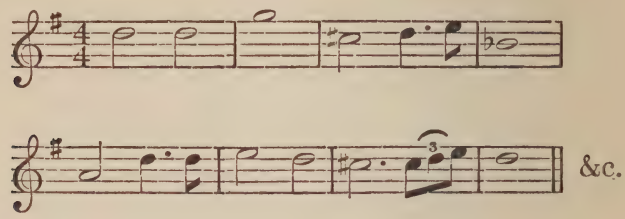


Tannhäuser, under the influence of this strain, sings his jubilant song of love:



He is answered, first by strange and riotous cries, and then by the seductive voice of Venus herself,

who appears and promises to fulfil his wildest dreams of bliss:



Again he sings his hymn in praise of the goddess, and is again answered by still more tumultuous shouts and savage cries of joy. Finally Venus carries Tannhäuser away to her abode of soul-destroying pleasure. The storm is laid, and only a soft breeze seems to stir the night air with a weird voluptuousness. Dawn breaks. Once more the pilgrims' chant is heard in the distance, then nearer and nearer as the sun ascends; but the soft sighing of the breeze, which at first had suggested the wailing of condemned souls, rises too, and swells into tidings of great joy, proclaiming the salvation of the Venusberg itself, and joining the pilgrims' chant in a chorus of redemption. All this, and much more, is in that glorious Overture, magnificent forecast of what is to come. Let us consider, in some detail, what follows, taking the music Act by Act.

FIRST ACT

At the very beginning of the opera, Wagner proclaimed his determination not to pander to the public taste at the expense of artistic conviction or dramatic requirement. He introduced the ballet in the opening scene, an arrangement without precedent and greatly resented at first, but in spite of protest the ballet retained its position. In this scene and the next we have reproduced with wonderful realistic power the atmosphere of "sultry sensuality" which lies over the Venusberg. The strains associated with Venus in the Overture are heard ever and anon till Tannhäuser regains his liberty, when the character of the music changes with the scene. The shepherd's pipe and song are as refreshing to the ear as the quiet pastoral beauty of the landscape is to the eye. Then the chant of the pilgrims approaches, and as it dies away the sound of the hunting bugles introduces the Landgrave and Minstrels. During this third scene only male voices are heard, a fact which heightens the contrast between it and the preceding scenes, where the female element predominates. The septet which forms the finale to Act I. is led up to by Wolfram in an exquisite melody which is heard later in the orchestra accompanying the voices.

SECOND ACT

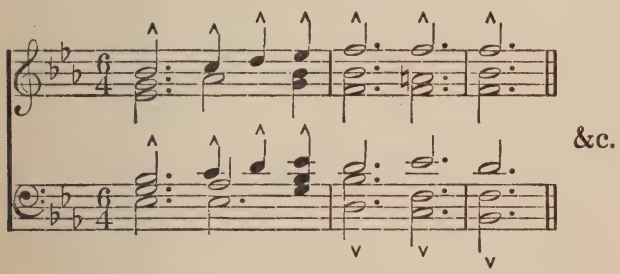
In the first part of Act II. Wagner adheres more or less to the traditional lines of grand opera. The Act opens with a short orchestral prelude, and the curtain rises on the entrance of Elisabeth, whose greeting to the Hall of Song is well known in the concert-room. Her duet with Tannhäuser follows the Italian style, but at its close, while Elisabeth gazes after Tannhäuser's departing figure, there is a beautiful Wagnerian touch in the introduction in the orchestra of the tender love theme, which opens the duet.

The tournament scene begins with the famous assembling march and chorus, in which the influence of Meyerbeer and the old school is obvious. The songs of the three knights are finely expressive of their respective sentiments, while Tannhäuser's last outburst in praise of Venus is a repetition of his song in the First Act. The working out of this scene is truly marvellous. The spiritual beauty of the songs of Wolfram and Walther, the martial ardour of Biterolf, the interruptions of Tannhäuser, the increasing dismay of the assembly at his growing excitement, culminating in general consternation and holy horror at the mention of Venus, the intercession of Elisabeth, the repentance of Tannhäuser, and the ray of hope which the pilgrims' chant brings

to his remorseful soul—all are depicted with unerring dramatic instinct. The whole scene is remarkable for psychological subtlety and musical beauty, and in the magnificent finale, which it would be difficult to equal for dramatic force, we have the real Wagner untrammelled by convention.

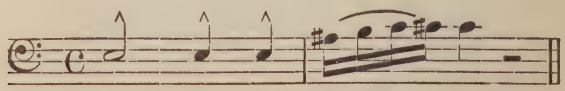
THIRD ACT

The impressive orchestral prelude is based on themes already heard, with the additional motive of "Pardon"—the Dresden Amen—afterwards to play an important part in the scene of Tannhäuser's pilgrimage:



The Act commences with a short passage for Wolfram, after which we again hear the pilgrims' chant. The beautiful prayer of Elisabeth is sometimes felt to be rather long, no doubt owing to the monotonous accompaniment of wood-wind alone, and also to the fact that only an exceptional artist

can give it the requisite colour. At its close the orchestra reminds us of the presence of Wolfram, who has been watching Elisabeth at her devotions, by a reminiscence of his song in the tournament. He would guide her homeward, but by an expressive gesture she implies that her way now leads to heaven, at the same time thanking him for his attachment. This scene, in which not a word is uttered, but where the feelings of Elisabeth and Wolfram are expressed entirely by gesture and by the orchestra, is one of the most pathetic ever written. To bring out its full meaning, however, the Elisabeth must be a great actress. Then follows the number which alone would prove that Wagner was a melodist of the very first rank, the exquisite "Address to the Evening Star," which has done so much to spread his name. The strains have scarcely died away when Tannhäuser enters, accompanied by a gloomy motive in the orchestra signifying that he has not received pardon:



&c.

His narrative, at first considered so wearisome, is now by common consent regarded as one of the most powerful passages in the opera, and perhaps for impressive declamation is unsurpassed by Wagner in any other work. In the last finale we have a

splendid example of continuous dramatic development. The principal motives reappear, and the opera ends with the pilgrims' chant, now sung by all in a triumphal hymn of thanksgiving.

In his orchestration Wagner was an innovator, as in most other departments of his art. What Berlioz had done for concert works, he was doing for the stage. His scoring was different from any that had so far been heard in connection with opera. Many of his effects, now so generally adopted, were then fresh and somewhat startling; and his method of employing the brass individually and in combination, his elaborate subdivision of the strings, and other devices, came as a revelation of orchestral possibilities. In his later works he occasionally indulged his love of the novel and bizarre to excess, but in "Tannhäuser" his originality in this respect is displayed with discrimination.

His sense of colour, as exhibited here, is wonderful. He seldom fails to find the exact combination to represent the emotion he wishes to express. For instance, what could be more suggestive of the Venusberg than the wicked phrase for the violas, the wild "skirling" of the flutes, oboes, clarinets, &c., and the sensuous tremolos and shakes of the violins in their upper register! What a fine contrast all this presents to the low tones of the bassoons and horns, as the solemn strains of the Pilgrims' Chorus fade away in the distance!

His strong feeling for light and shade is exemplified in the peaceful note of the solitary shepherd's pipe, heard in the cool shade of the Wartburg valley, so refreshing after the sultry saturnalian atmosphere of the Grotto. In "Tannhäuser," too, Wagner shows the knack of throwing essentials into high relief. Though here this is occasionally achieved by means of what may be called musical padding, it is a point which he sometimes lost sight of in other works, where he was now and again over lavish in his elaboration of details.

As regards the old charge of lack of melody, the popularity of the Overture, of certain well-known excerpts, indeed of the whole opera, is sufficient refutation. If the melodic invention is not entirely free from mannerisms, it invariably shows originality.

To sum up, though rather unequal, exhibiting as it does both the strength and the weakness of the composer, "Tannhäuser" marked an epoch in the history of opera, and though professedly depreciated by Wagner himself in his later days, it will not be the least enduring monument to his memory.

THE HISTORY

WAGNER accepted the theory of the Greeks that the myths of a people provide the subjects fittest for dramatic treatment. He held that the basis of drama should be the development of national legend, the outcome of national feeling. When, on the completion of "The Flying Dutchman," he was looking for a new subject and happened to light on a popular version of the Tannhäuser legend, he at once recognised a suitable theme. Being already familiar with Hoffmann's "Contest of the Minnesänger at the Wartburg," he combined the two romances with various traits from different versions of the same stories into an artistic whole, and thus provided himself with the requisite libretto.

The book of "Tannhäuser" was begun at Teplitz in 1842, while the final arrangements were being made for producing "Rienzi." Throughout 1844 Wagner was busy scoring and revising the work. By the beginning of 1845 "Tannhäuser" was ready for rehearsal, and in the following October it was produced at Dresden.

The result was not an unqualified success. It provoked a storm of newspaper criticism, and the attitude of the public generally showed that

Wagner's aims as an artist were entirely misunderstood. Tichatschek in the *title-rôle* and Joanna Wagner as Elisabeth were excellent, but Mdme. Schröder-Devrient, great artist though she was, could make nothing of the Venus music. The whole first scene with its introductory ballet bewildered the audience. The scene of Tannhäuser's pilgrimage, one of the finest in the work, was found tedious, while, on the other hand, the march in the Second Act, one of the most commonplace numbers, was applauded to the echo. Some of the critics discovered that "Wagner had no melody, no form." The subject was said to be "distressing, harassing," whereas "art ought to be cheerful and consoling." It was even asked, "Why should not Tannhäuser marry Elisabeth and all end happily?" Men who ought to have known better, among them Berlioz, spoke and wrote of it slightingly. Mendelssohn expressed himself as pleased with a "canonic" entrance (only that!) in the Adagio of the second finale. Prosper Mérimée said he could compose something as good after hearing his cat walk up and down over the keys of the piano! Rossini, who never went to the opera, made an exception in the case of "Tannhäuser," but when asked what he thought of it, replied: "It is too important and too elaborate a work to be judged after a single hearing; as far as I am concerned, I shall not give it a second."

It was warmly received, however, by a few ardent friends and admirers. One of those who first recognised its genius was Schumann. In a letter to Dorn he wrote: "I wish you could see 'Tannhäuser'; it contains deeper, more original and altogether an hundred-fold better things than his previous operas—at the same time a good deal that is musically trivial. On the whole Wagner may become of great importance and significance to the stage, and I am sure he is possessed of the needful courage. Technical matters, instrumentation, I find altogether remarkable, beyond comparison better than formerly."

Four years later "Tannhäuser" was produced by Liszt at Weimar, where it was received with greater sympathy and appreciation. In 1852 a considerable number of theatres applied for the performing rights, and performances were given with an increasing measure of success. When it was produced in Paris in 1861, through the influence of Princess Metternich, very little of the music was heard. The only attraction for the Jockey Club was the ballet (a *sine quâ non* of French grand opera in those days), and as that occurred at the beginning of the opera, instead of in its usual place in the Second Act, it would be over before they had finished dinner. They therefore determined that no part of the work should be heard by any one, and organised a claque to whistle and howl throughout the performance. In a communication to Jules Noriac, then editor of *Figaro*, and

referring to this fiasco, Wagner wrote: "Never have I heard such an infernal noise"; while in a letter to Victor Cochinat, contributor to *La Causerie* and other papers, he declared: "I am for ever excluded from French theatres. For what happened at this production will be repeated always and everywhere in France." The master forgot for the moment that "the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." In recent years the growth of Wagner-lovers in Paris has brought the number of performances of the Bayreuth master's works level with those given of Meyerbeer's operas.

The Overture to "Tannhäuser" was first performed in England by the Philharmonic Society in May 1855, when Wagner was conducting the Society's concerts for the season. Here is the *Times* criticism, sufficiently staggering to read nowadays: "A more inflated display of extravagance and noise has rarely been submitted to an audience; and it was a pity to hear so magnificent an orchestra engaged in almost fruitless attempts at accomplishing things which, even if really practicable, would lead to nothing."

Regarding this visit to London, Wagner wrote to Liszt:

You have probably heard how charmingly Queen Victoria behaved to me. She attended the seventh concert (June 11th) with Prince Albert, and as they wanted to hear something of mine, I had the "Tannhäuser" Overture repeated, which helped me to a little external *amende*. I really seemed to have pleased

the Queen. In a conversation I had with her, by desire, after the first part of the concert, she was so kind that I was really quite touched. These two were the first people in England who dared to speak in my favour openly and undisguisedly, and if you consider that they had to deal with a political outlaw, charged with high treason and "wanted" by the police, you will think it natural that I am sincerely grateful to both.

The opera was produced in Italian at Covent Garden on May 6, 1876, but in spite of the excellence of the principal artists the general spirit of the rendering was the opposite of what the composer had intended. During Wagner's second visit to London (in 1877) the work was given again. While praising individual singers, the master considered this performance the worst he had ever seen for *ensemble.*

"Tannhäuser" has grown gradually in public favour, and at the present time it is without doubt one of the greatest draws in the operatic repertoire.

LOHENGRIN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

LOHENGRIN, *Knight of the Holy Grail* (*Tenor*)
HENRY THE FOWLER, *King of Germany* (*Bass*)
FREDERIC OF TELRAMUND (*Bass*)
The Royal Herald (*Bass*)
GOTTFRIED, *Elsa's Brother, mute personage*
Four Nobles of Brabant (*Tenors and Basses*)
ELSA OF BRABANT (*Soprano*)
ORTRUD (*Mezzo-Soprano*)
Four Pages (*Sopranos and Altos*)

Chorus of Saxon and Brabantian Nobles, Ladies, Pages, &c.

FIRST ACT

THE opening scene is in Brabant, with the Scheldt pursuing its course—that same river which to-day flows by the busy crowded docks of Antwerp. Henry I., surnamed the "Fowler," has come hither to levy a force against the threateningly invading Hungarians. Discord and anarchy are what he finds in his kingdom; these arising chiefly out of the following circumstances: Elsa, daughter of the late Duke of Brabant, and her brother Godfrey, the heir to the throne, were left as orphans in the care of Count Frederic of Telramund. Telramund had aspired to Elsa's hand, and a promise of marriage had been given. Elsa declines to fulfil the promise, and Telramund falls a victim to the machinations of Ortrud, who is intriguing for the crown. Ortrud does not really love Telramund—"a brave and upright soldier, honoured by all, and famous for his deeds of daring until he fell under her influence." But she sees her opportunity in Telramund's chagrin at being refused by Elsa. She inflames his ambition, and induces him to give up Elsa and marry herself. Next she entices Elsa's brother, Godfrey, away to the dark forest near her castle, and throwing a

golden chain around his neck, changes him, by her witchery, into a swan. Returning to the castle, she tells Telramund, her husband, that she has seen Elsa drown her brother in a pool. Telramund gives ready credence to the story; and under pressure of certain threats he subsequently extorts from Elsa what he regards as an admission of her guilt. It is at this point that the action of the drama opens.

King Henry demands from Telramund the reason for the country being so disturbed. By way of answer Telramund formally declares that Elsa has made away with her brother so that she may herself succeed to the lordship of Brabant. To Henry and to everybody else concerned this seems incredible. Elsa is summoned to the royal presence. She comes, "clad in white, with sad and resigned demeanour, attempting no defence." Instead, she recounts a wonderful dream she has had. She tells how a knight, clad in shining armour, leaning on his sword, with a golden horn suspended from his belt, came to her from heaven, promising help. "That knight I will await," is her answer to Henry; "*he* shall my champion be."

Elsa's trust is now to be tried. Henry thrusts his sword into the earth, and suggests testing the judgment of God by the ordeal of battle. To Elsa, the inner vision of the champion, her knight, carries more import than the menace of her enemies. She has no hesitation in accepting the challenge thrown

The Coming of Lohengrin

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out by the king. Neither has Telramund, relying on Ortrud and his own strength of arm. The challenge is blared forth by the trumpeters. No reply comes. "Another summons," says Elsa, recalling the ancient appeal to Baal; "my champion was too far away to hear the first." Silence follows; Elsa is on her knees, praying. But what is this? Look up the river. There comes a boat drawn by a swan, and in that boat, behold a knight in sparkling silver armour, leaning on his sword, with horn at his belt—the very knight of Elsa's vision.

There is great excitement as the champion disembarks under the shadow of the royal oak. Telramund gazes, struck dumb; Ortrud is seized with terror, recognising in the swan, by the chain around its neck, Elsa's enchanted brother Godfrey. Lohengrin bids farewell to the swan, imploring it to be faithful and bring him joy on its return (the meaning of this is seen at the end of the drama). He salutes Henry, and declares that Elsa is entirely innocent of the charge laid against her. Will Elsa accept him as her champion and lover? In joyful assent she drops at his feet. But there is one essential condition, and upon that condition the entire drama turns: If the knight proves victorious, Elsa will be his for ever, but—she must never ask his name, to whom he owes his birth, the country from whence he came. If Elsa violates this solemn prohibition, then Lohengrin—for it is

he—will return immediately to his father's kingdom. The condition is implicitly accepted. Lohengrin and Telramund prepare for the combat. It begins after the king has given three strokes with his sword. There is enchantment in Lohengrin's weapon: Telramund is worsted in the duel (though his life is spared), and the Act closes with rejoicings over the approaching nuptials of Lohengrin and Elsa.

SECOND ACT

When the Second Act opens, night has fallen. We see Telramund and Ortrud on the steps of the Minster, plotting together, scheming revenge. Before them is the Palace, brilliantly lighted; rejoicings proceeding inside over the coming union of Elsa and her knight. Telramund, wrathful at Ortrud's defeated promises in the matter of the duel, turns upon her with reproaches. Ortrud temporises by suggesting that Lohengrin triumphed in the fight, not by his personal prowess, but by sorcery. Moreover, if Elsa could only be lured into surprising him of his name (one thinks here of Samson and Delilah), he would inevitably lose his sway. For Ortrud knows that none but Elsa has the power to force a reply from her champion, by reason of her spiritual tie with him: as Wagner says, she is "the other half of his being." And

Telramund and Ortrud on the steps of the Minster

then, if *this* should fail, there was still another resource. Deprive the knight of even a finger-joint, and his power must be lost.

Telramund derives from all this a new confidence in Ortrud's powers, and more than ever thirsts for vengeance. Suddenly Elsa, robed in white, steps out upon the balcony of the Kemenate (the women's quarters), and "breathes out the tale of her happiness to the breezes of night." Ortrud thereupon accosts her with assumed humility, and presently admits her to the Kemenate, promising to secure for ever to Elsa, by her magic agency, the love of her champion knight. At first Elsa scornfully rejects the offer, but Ortrud so works on her credulity that the latter pityingly invites Ortrud to share her faith and trust. At break of day, in answer to the royal summons, the nobles gather at the Minster gate, and immediately after, the long bridal procession is seen emerging from the Kemenate. Elsa is just about to set foot on the Minster steps when Ortrud springs forward, barring her way. "What do you know of your bridegroom's name and rank?" she tauntingly demands. Lohengrin enters with king and nobles. Elsa casts herself into his arms, calling for protection from Ortrud. "What do I see! the accursed woman with thee?" he exclaims, in surprise. Elsa has perforce to admit that she ignored the injunction of her champion to have no dealings with Ortrud. "Blame me if I disobeyed

thee!" she says. Lohengrin soothes her fears, and the procession starts again, the knight sternly exclaiming to Ortrud, "Away! thou awful woman! here shall victory never be thine!" But once more the procession is stopped, this time by Telramund, who, on the very threshold of the Minster, accuses Lohengrin of having achieved his victory by sorcery. The king, however, retains his belief in Lohengrin. Telramund is pushed aside; having meanwhile sown the seeds of mistrust in Elsa's mind. Give me leave, he says, but to "wrench the smallest part, a fingertip, and, I swear to thee, clearly shalt thou see thyself what from thee he hides; then bound to thee, never shall he leave thee. This night I shall be near to thee—call'st thou, without harm quickly it is accomplished." Elsa, it is clear, is going to break her vow to Lohengrin. The procession starts once more and files slowly into the Cathedral; then the curtain is lowered.

In this connection, though it is rather out of keeping with the formal unfolding of the story, I cannot resist quoting the following from Wagner himself. Writing to Liszt in 1850, he says:

> When I conceived and wrote the Second Act, it had not escaped me how important it would be for the proper mood of the spectators to show that Elsa's contentment at the last words of Lohengrin is not really complete and genuine; the public should feel that Elsa violently forces herself to conquer her doubt, and we should in reality fear that, having once indulged in brooding over Lohengrin, she will finally succumb and ask the

prohibited question. In the production of this general feeling of fear lies the only necessity for a Third Act in which that fear is realised; without it the opera should end here, for the chief problem would not only have been mooted, but satisfactorily solved. In order to produce this feeling very distinctly and tangibly, I invented the following dramatic point: Elsa is led by Lohengrin up the steps of the Minster; on the topmost step she looks downwards with timid apprehension; her eye involuntarily seeks Frederic, of whom she is still thinking; at that moment her glance falls on Ortrud, who stands below, and raises her hand in a threatening manner. . . . Elsa then turns away in terror, and only when the king, after this interruption, once more proceeds towards the entrance of the Minster with the bridal pair, does the curtain drop.

THIRD ACT

A solemn musical prelude, the well-known Bridal March, opens this Act, Elsa and Lohengrin being meanwhile conducted—the one by the ladies, the other by the kings and nobles—to the bridal chamber. After invoking blessings upon them, the procession retires, leaving the newly-wedded pair alone, for the first time. Now comes the crisis of the drama. Elsa's doubts will not be stifled. "How am I to know," she cries, "that the swan will not come some day as mysteriously as before and take my beloved from my arms?" Lohengrin vainly tries to calm her. Elsa becomes more and more insistent. May she not just whisper her husband's name to herself? Lohengrin tries by every conceivable means to avert

the impending danger. He even goes so far as to hint of his origin: he "speaks of the realms of bliss he has left for her sake." But this only adds to Elsa's misgivings, to that terrible fear of losing her lord in which, as Wagner said, "lies the only necessity for a Third Act." If Lohengrin came, as he averred, from a world of splendour, he would probably want to return, and Elsa would be unable to prevent him. And so, in her frenzied excitement she puts the fatal question: "Speak! who then art thou? Tell me what is thy name? Whence, then, hast thou come? What is thy rank?"

Elsa has broken her vow; the spell has vanished; the evil is irreparable. Just then a secret door is burst open, and in marches Telramund, followed by a quartet of disaffected nobles, with swords drawn. Lohengrin lifts his sacred weapon and the false knight falls dead at his feet. The body is borne away, and Lohengrin orders Elsa's maidens to lead her into the royal presence, where he will proclaim her rank. Day dawns and the scene closes. Then we are on the banks of the Scheldt once more. Telramund's body is brought thither. Elsa, too, appears, with head bent, her anguished expression enlisting the compassion of even the attendants. Then her champion, her armoured knight, her husband, is seen advancing.

The army is assembled: enthusiasm greets the knight, and he is given to understand that they look to him to lead the forces to war. Alas! that he is

The Attack on the Bridal Chamber

not free to do. He tells why he killed Telramund, and how Elsa had been tempted to violate her vow. "To treacherous advice her heart she gave away! In reward of her mistrust's wild request, let now the answer no longer be kept back: I durst refuse it to the foe's insistence; my name and being must I now declare. Mark well if I must shun the light! Before the world, before the king and realm, my mystery I faithfully unveil." In a word, Lohengrin answers Elsa's question. He tells of the Sanctuary of Montsalvat and its Brotherhood of Knights; how on their missions the power of the Grail is with them, but should their names be revealed they must either lose that power or return to the Temple. "Now hear how I reward forbidden question," are Lohengrin's words. "The Grail it was that sent me here to you. My father Parsifal wears its crown. Its Knight am I, and Lohengrin my name."

The secret is out, and Lohengrin's mystic power vanishes. Elsa has erred, and Lohengrin must leave her. The swan appears once more with the boat. "So soon to see thee ne'er I thought," says Lohengrin. "After a year slowly had passed—the period of thy slavery—then by the Grail released at last, I hoped my swan again to see." Lohengrin must depart. He breathes a last farewell to Elsa, giving her his conquering sword and his horse to aid Godfrey should he be permitted to return. He moves towards the boat, and Ortrud appears, the moment of her

triumph having come. The chain by which the swan draws the boat was, she says, attached by herself. "That chain, which at a glance I knew, changed to a swan this dukedom's heir. Hence by the swan thy knight is carried. Thanks! thou hast served me well, indeed. The knight, if longer he had tarried, thy brother from the spell had freed." The swan, in a word, is none other than Elsa's brother, Godfrey, transformed to that shape by her magic arts. But Lohengrin has still some resource left. He sinks on his knees in silent prayer, and in answer to his petition the white dove of the Grail descends from the sky and detaches the chain from the swan. The swan disappears and the missing heir of Brabant takes its place. Ortrud's witchcraft is undone. Elsa clasps her restored brother to her breast and sinks lifeless into his arms. The dove (symbol of the Divine Spirit) attached to the boat, bears Lohengrin rapidly away over the waters of the Scheldt, and the youthful Godfrey is proclaimed Protector of Brabant. So ends the story of Lohengrin as set out by Richard Wagner.

The Descent of the Dove

SOURCES AND MEANING OF THE STORY

THE story of Lohengrin is as old as the thirteenth century. Wagner says it is "no mere outcome of Christian meditation, but one of man's earliest poetic ideals." Just as the composer traced the myth of the "Flying Dutchman" to the Hellenic Odyssey, and found in Ulysses the prototype of Tannhäuser, "so do we," he said, "already meet in the Grecian mythos the outlines of the myth of Lohengrin." Zeus and Semele, Eros and Psyche, Elsa and Lohengrin—all, Wagner insists, stand for the same old story, the necessity of love. The woman for whom the Flying Dutchman yearned, from out the ocean of his misery; the woman who, star-like, showed to Tannhäuser the way that led from the hot passion of the Venusberg to Heaven; the woman who drew Lohengrin from sunny heights to the depths of Earth's warm breast—woman, woman: all yearned for woman, for the human heart.

Wagner goes a long way back for the origin of the story. We need not follow him. It is sufficient to say that the legend of Lohengrin, son of Parsifal, exists in many forms, and can be traced to several

sources. The old Celtic legend of King Arthur and his knights and the story of the Holy Grail are mixed up with the purely German myth of the knight who arrives in a boat drawn by a swan. It is important, however, to know something of the tradition of the Grail. The Holy Grail, symbol of the supra-sensual, is the vessel in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the last drops of Christ's blood upon the cross. According to the tradition followed by Wagner, it is in the keeping of Parsifal, the lord of the sacred palace of Montsalvat, whose son Lohengrin is. Lohengrin is one of the earthly champions of the Grail, and the tradition has thus a prominent place in Wagner's drama. One may put it something like this: The Holy Grail is the fountain of divine love. Its knights (Lohengrin and the rest) are sent to shed some of that love on earth by redressing wrongs and fostering righteousness. But they may dwell only where there is purity of heart and perfect faith in their power. Elsa, at first innocent and trustful, begins to harbour suspicions of Lohengrin, and therefore loses him. It is the familiar idea of salvation through faith. As soon as we begin to distrust, we are undone.

I have described the ending of "Lohengrin" as sad. But it seems also inevitable. The good angel of the human soul, says a modern writer, in effect, is its ideal. If it is called upon, it will come. But if the imprudent Psyche (in this case Elsa) doubts

it and its divine message, immediately the angel veils its face and disappears. In the tragedy of Lohengrin's character and situation Wagner saw, with clearest sureness, the type of the only absolute tragedy; in fine, of the tragic element of modern life: a tragedy, too, of just as great significance for the present age as was the "Antigone"—though in another relation—for the life of the Hellenic State. Lohengrin, he says, "sought a woman who should trust in him, who should not ask how he was hight or whence he came, but love him as he was, and because he was whate'er she deemed him. He sought the woman who would not call for explanations or defence, but who should *love* him with an unconditioned love. Therefore must he cloak his higher nature, for only in the non-revealing of this higher essence could there lie the surety that he was not adored because of it alone, or humbly worshipped as a being past all understanding,—whereas his longing was not for worship nor for adoration, but for the only things sufficient to redeem him from his loneliness, to still his deep desire for Love, for being loved, for being understood through love."

"Lohengrin" has not the human interest of "Tannhäuser," but the psychological treatment of its characters is far more subtle. Liszt emphasises the "grandiose scale" on which it is conceived, and grandiose it unquestionably is. It represents a drama

the most complete, the most skilled, of the highest literary finish. The masterly originality of its style, the beauty of its versification, the ingenious arrangement of its plot, its eloquent passion: there it stands a work, of its kind, unique, unapproachable.

THE MUSIC

In the case of a Wagnerian opera, it is always more or less difficult to deal with the music by itself, so bound up is it with the other elements of the drama. Wagner denied altogether the separateness of art, and practically said that if you understand his text, you ought to understand his musical setting of that text. He regarded the music as merely an interpretive instrument, as one only of several means of expression at the disposal of the lyrical dramatist —a means and not an end. He insisted that the auditor should go to the theatre, not to hear music, but to witness a drama. Here is a deeply interesting letter addressed to a friend in 1850:

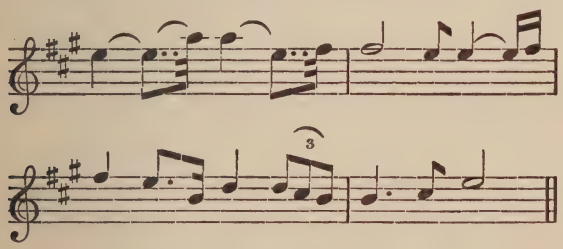
> An audience which assembles in a fair mood is satisfied as soon as it distinctly understands what is going forward, and it is a great mistake to think that a theatrical audience must have a special knowledge of music in order to receive the right impression of a musical drama. To this entirely erroneous opinion we have been brought by the fact that in opera music has wrongly been made the aim, while the drama was merely a means for the display of the music. Music, on the contrary, should do no more than contribute its full share toward making the drama more clearly and quickly comprehensible at every moment. While listening to a good—that is, a rational—opera people should, so to speak, not think of the music at all, but only feel it in an unconscious manner, while their fullest sympathy should be wholly occupied by the action represented.

There we have Wagner's own view, stated in his own words. He objects to anything like an exclusive study of his music, and insists that you should yourself find in it a reflection of the text. Liszt gave striking corroboration of Wagner's principle when he wrote: "The distinguishing feature of the music of 'Lohengrin' is unity of conception and style; there is not a single melodic phrase, still less an *ensemble*, nor indeed a passage of any kind, the peculiar nature and true meaning of which would be understood if it were separated from its connection with the whole work. Every part connects, binds together and enhances the rest. All is of a piece, and so united that the parts cannot be torn asunder."

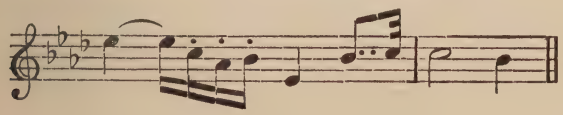
Practically, as Mr. Haweis, the "fiddling parson," observed long ago, the whole of "Lohengrin" is in the masterly Prelude. The descent of the Knight of the Swan from the jasper shrines of the sacred palace of Montsalvat, his holy mission to rescue Elsa from her false accusers—his high and chivalric love—his dignified trouble at being urged by her to reveal his name, that insatiable feminine curiosity which wrecks the whole—the darker scenes of treachery by which Elsa is goaded to press her fatal inquiry—the magnificent climax of the First Act—the sense of weird mystery that hangs about the appearance and reappearance of the swan, and the final departure of the glittering Knight of the

Holy Grail—allegory of heavenly devotion stooping to lift up human love, and dashed with earth's bitterness in the attempt: to those who understand the pathos, delicacy, and full intensity of the "Lohengrin" Prelude, this, and more, will become as vivid as life and emotion can make it.

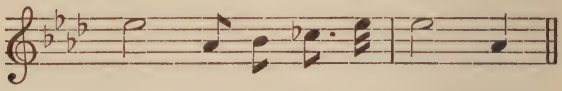
In "Lohengrin" the *leitmotiv* system had not reached anything like the full development it was yet to reach in Wagner's hands, but he had already used it in "The Flying Dutchman," and now it was nearing its full meaning. The most significant of all the *motivs* in the "Lohengrin" score is that of the Holy Grail, which strikes first on the ear in the Prelude. Here it is in its simplest form:



This theme, easily recognised, recurs again and again throughout. Then we have Lohengrin's *motiv*, heard first when the knight appears in his shining armour, and reintroduced at various points—



The Warning *motiv* is first heard when Lohengrin solemnly charges Elsa never to ask his name—



In addition to these, there are a "Swan" *motiv*, a "Doubt" *motiv*, a "Judgment of God" *motiv*, and a special *motiv* for Elsa. It would take a great deal of space and music type to illustrate and explain these, and in the end little would be gained. The trained musician will recognise the leading themes for himself; the technically untrained yet intelligent and sympathetic listener will be satisfied if he realises the effects they are intended to produce.

A detailed account of the many musical beauties of "Lohengrin" would be, as Mr. Louis Elson observes, a complete description of the opera. Elsa's recital of her dream, and its fulfilment by Lohengrin's arrival, form a climax more stirring than any on the operatic stage. Lohengrin's impressive warning not to ask his name, and the malevolent passion of Ortrud, are typified in phrases that foreshadow all the condensed power of the guiding motives of later operas. The beautiful march to the church is melody as definite as any of the Italian sort, but supported by rich and attractive harmonies instead of the few simple chords of the earlier style.

The prelude to the Third Act, the exquisite love-duet, and Lohengrin's departure, keep up the standard of the work, and show that if Wagner discarded the older methods, he was able to substitute something better in their place. Here his music attains a freedom and an intensity of expression previously unknown. Those who listen attentively must surely be impressed by the many beautiful harmonies with which the work abounds; by the treatment of the touching love-scenes; by the melody (*melos*, as Wagner calls it) which, unfettered by traditional notions, is so freely encountered throughout. Above all, the magnificent orchestration cannot fail to arrest marked attention. The orchestra is here made a powerful agency to enrich, heighten, and intensify the dramatic expression of every character.

THE HISTORY

WAGNER first read his "Lohengrin" poem in 1845 to a private circle of friends, among whom were Schumann, Hiller (the painter), Robert Reinick, Gottfried Semper, and others. Schumann (we need not consider the rest) was enthusiastic. He told Mendelssohn that Wagner's text had been a two-fold surprise to him, since he had himself been thinking of the same theme, and must now throw it overboard.

The score of "Lohengrin," completed in 1848 (one of the stormiest years of Continental history, when the revolutionary rising in Paris seemed to threaten destruction to the thrones of the neighbouring countries), was not published until 1852. But the opera had been produced in 1850 at Weimar, by Wagner's "rarest" friend, Franz Liszt, to whom (to "my dear Liszt") it was dedicated. Wagner was in exile at the time, and there is a touch of pathos about the fact that he was afraid to return, even secretly, to hear his own work. He used to say, bitterly, that, for many years, he was the only German who had not heard "Lohengrin." As a matter of fact, he did not hear it until 1861. The

Weimar performance of 1850 did not count for much except to Wagner himself. "At the end of my last stay in Paris," he wrote, referring to 1850, "when, ill, miserable, and despairing, I sat brooding over my fate, my eye fell on the score of my 'Lohengrin,' totally forgotten by me. Suddenly I felt something like compassion that this music should never sound from off the death-pale paper. Two words I wrote to Liszt; his answer was the news that preparations were made for the performance on the largest scale the limited means of Weimar would permit. Everything that men and circumstances could do was done in order to make the work understood."

Alas! the work was neither understood nor appreciated. The critics all joined in a hue and cry against the opera, denouncing it as unmelodious, formless, meaningless; the quintessence of all that was bad in music. Every witling who heard it had his fling at it. Not until 1853, when it was given at Wiesbaden, did it really begin to take hold. Its progress even then was slow enough. It did not reach New York till 1871, up to which time it had not got beyond the Continent of Europe. London heard it for the first time in 1875, when two performances were given—one at Covent Garden, the other at Drury Lane, with Nilsson as Elsa. But there was no enthusiasm.

About this time it was considered a species of

high-treason, especially in England, to speak of Wagner as a composer at all. He was regarded as a musical madman. "The apogee of hideousness, a distracting and altogether distressing noise, a mere blaring of brass, and a short method of utterly ruining the voice." So they described the "music of the future" (the future of lost souls, they said!). John Hullah called "Lohengrin" an opera without music. To Gustav Engel it seemed like "blubbering baby-talk." Dr. Hanslick, Germany's leading musical critic, said that "the simplest song of Mendelssohn appeals more to heart and soul than ten Wagnerian operas." When Mapleson first proposed to introduce "Lohengrin" at Her Majesty's Theatre, the idea was scouted as ridiculous. If Mapleson had persisted, Wagner would have been received with a storm of abuse. Curiously enough, "Lohengrin" was not given at Bayreuth until 1894, twelve years after the date of the first festival there.

In London the history of the opera has been rather interesting. The Carl Rosa Company followed the first production by a performance in English in 1880. In 1899 the Moody-Manners Company gave its initial performance of the work, with Madame Fanny Moody as Elsa and Mr. Hedmondt as Lohengrin. In performance the opera is always subjected to certain "cuts," though Wagner protested against them. In the 1899 production the "cuts" were restored, but this was

subsequently regarded as only an interesting experiment, the usual acting version containing all that is essential for the proper representation of the opera. Wagner, naturally enough, thought otherwise. When Liszt was arranging for the Weimar performance, the composer wrote to him: "If cuts are made, the chain of comprehension will be torn asunder; to capitulate to the enemy is not to conquer; the enemy himself must surrender; and that enemy is the laziness and flabbiness of our actors, who must be driven to feel and think." The only comment suggested by this is, that though art may be long, time is fleeting. We should never get to our beds if "Lohengrin" were given in its original integrity!

TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

TRISTAN, *a Breton Knight, Nephew of King Mark* (*Tenor*)
KING MARK *of Cornwall* (*Bass*)
ISOLDE, *Princess of Ireland* (*Soprano*)
KURVENAL, *Tristan's devoted servant* (*Baritone*)
MELOT, *one of King Mark's Courtiers* (*Tenor*)
BRANGÄNE, *Isolde's Friend and Attendant* (*Soprano*)
A Shepherd (*Tenor*)
A Steersman (*Baritone*)
A Sailor Lad (*Tenor*)
Chorus of Sailors (*Tenors and Basses*)
Chorus of Knights, Esquires, and Men-at-Arms (*Tenors and Basses*)

SOURCE AND MEANING OF THE STORY

"TRISTAN" is an old, old tale, not, as some imagine, original with Wagner. There is a poem on the subject dating from about 1150—a fact in itself sufficient to emphasise the early origin of the legend. The romantic story had its beginning as a Celtic conception, running somewhat as follows.

Tristram (this was the earliest form of the name) was the love-child of King Mark of Cornwall's sister and Roland of Ermonie. As a youth of fifteen, he went to Cornwall, where he entranced the Court by his minstrelsy. He slew Moraunt in a duel, but was himself wounded almost to the point of death. For three years he lay ill. Then, carried to Ireland, he was cured by Ysolt (spelt also Iseult) or Ysonde, daughter of the Queen. The Princess, his nurse, captivated him by her grace and beauty, and when he returned to Cornwall it was of her alone he could speak. His uncle's envy was excited, and Tristram was accordingly despatched to Ireland to solicit the hand of Ysolt for the King.

Tristram escorted the lady on her voyage to England, but both unwittingly drank of a love-

philtre sent by the Queen for Mark, and henceforward no man or woman could come between them. Ysolt became the wife of King Mark; but her heart was ever with her lover, and by the connivance of her clever maid, Brengwain, she had many a clandestine interview with him. Tristram was outlawed from Cornwall, but again brought to his uncle's Court, and once more the impassioned intrigues of the pair were resumed.

Next, Tristram travelled to Spain, Ermonie, Brittany; and here he married another Ysolt, her with the White Hand, daughter of Duke Florentine. But that old love-draught was still potent. Tristram could never forget his Ysolt of Ireland. Badly wounded in battle, he sent a messenger to summon her to him. "If you bring her with you," he said, "hoist a white sail; if you bring her not, let your sail be black."

There is an interval of time. Then the ship is sighted. "What is the colour of her sail?" asks Tristram eagerly. It was white. But Ysolt of Brittany, madly jealous, as was natural, told Tristram that the sail was black; whereupon the love-sick exile sank back and died. Ysolt of Ireland threw herself upon his corpse in a despair of grief, and died heart-broken beside him. King Mark, having learned the story of the love-potion, forgave the lovers and buried them in one grave; planting over Ysolt a rose-tree, and over Tristram a vine,

which grew up so inextricably intertwined that no man could ever separate the branches.

Such was the original legend. Its fundamental idea, summarised, is that of the love-philtre, fatal, irresistible, overpowering, and uniting two human beings; of love vanquishing everything—honour, family, society, life and death, but which is itself ennobled by its very grandeur and fidelity. For it bears within itself its own punishment as well as its justification; its religion and its world; its hell and its heaven; supreme sorrow and supreme consolation. It should be noted, however, as Mr. Henderson has pointed out, that in Wagner's drama the philtre performs the office of Fate in the ancient Greek tragedy. In the plays of Sophocles and Æschylus, mortals fulfil their manifest destinies; but Fate is the secret agency which hurries them forward to their ends. So, in this drama of Wagner, Tristan and Isolde are the victims of a fatal love before the action begins, and the philtre is only the instrument through which all restraints are removed, and the unhappy pair hurled into the vortex of their own passion, helpless victims of cruel and inexorable Destiny.

Note will have been made, in reading above, of how Wagner has varied and improved upon the old Tristram legend. His direct source was the unfinished poem of nearly twenty thousand words made about 1210 by a certain Gottfried of Stras-

burg, a German. There are some variations between the original form of the legend as just detailed and Gottfried's recast. But only one point need be noticed. In Gottfried's poem, Tristram does not marry the second Ysolt. Here Wagner, with his unerring insight, follows Gottfried. In Wagner's drama there is no second Ysolt. Matthew Arnold has a version in which there is not only a second Ysolt, but a second Ysolt who tenderly and lovingly nurses her dying husband while waiting the arrival of the first Ysolt. Bayard Taylor simply scorned the idea of such a thing happening as a second marriage. So did Wagner. As is invariably the case, his treatment of the story "draws together all the beauties of the original material and moulds them into a compact, consistent whole, instinct with dramatic force and poetic beauty."

For those who desire to read more fully about the old legend (and no Wagner enthusiast can read enough) it may be added that there have been several versions in English. Thus, there is the "Sir Tristrem" dating from the close of the thirteenth century, which was first edited by Sir Walter Scott in 1804. Scott ascribed the authorship to that half mythical Thomas of Ercildoune—the familiarly named "Thomas the Rhymer," whose couplets of prophetic import are still quoted. Chaucer, Lydgate, and Gower all make reference to the romantic story. It became associated also

with the Arthurian romances of the Round Table; and it has a place in Sir Thomas Malory's famous composition of these, the exquisite "Morte d'Arthur." Modern English poetry reasserts it through the lines of Tennyson, Swinburne, and (as already indicated) Matthew Arnold. The latter's "Tristram and Iseult" gives beautiful expression to the pathos and pity of the story from the side of the second Ysolt. It embodies at least one splendid anapæstic couplet which catches the ear and clings to the memory for a lifetime—

> What voices are these on the clear night air?
> What lights in the Court? what steps on the stair?

The figure of Iseult with the White Hand stands out here with the right Pre-Raphaelite distinctness and charm.

Tennyson's treatment of the story in "The Last Tournament" in the "Idylls of the King" (closely based on Malory) is too familiar to require more than passing mention. Swinburne's splendid poetic realisation of the theme in "Tristram of Lyonesse" (1882) is not so well known. In some points the handling of the tale by Wagner and Swinburne is alike, in others it is markedly dissimilar. As one of the poet's biographers has remarked, the story of Tristan is dealt with by Wagner much as are the broken fragments of Siegmund's sword by his son: he made no attempt to

weld the pieces together; they had to be molten and reforged before the perfect blade was worthy of the hand of Siegfried. Swinburne, on the other hand, has followed the legend more closely, though he has given a more prominent place than of old to the second Ysolt. The Tristans of Wagner and Swinburne are akin in their nobility and courtesy, but Swinburne's protagonist is a much saner and less excitable lover than Wagner's, and has a tendency to tiresome metaphysical musings. Swinburne's Ysolt, again, is veiled and shadowy beside the Isolde of the music-drama, vehement in all things as a storm-wind, in vengeance, in love, in death.[1]

But indeed no writer of verse has done with the story what Wagner has done. The intense dramatic interest of his music-poem, the absorbing and entrancing beauty and passion of its multitudinous and miraculous harmonies, are, and cannot fail to be, absent from all merely verbal versions. In both directions the poet must be at a disadvantage: in the form of narrative verse, which admits of no great dramatic interest; in the mode of human speech, which is below the capacity of many instruments for the expression of emotion. Yet,

[1] For a detailed comparison between the versions of the legend as treated by Malory, Matthew Arnold, Tennyson, and Swinburne, the interested reader should consult Mr. H. E. Krehbiel's "Studies in the Wagnerian Drama."

looked at through its text alone, Wagner's is the most wonderful of dramas. The story is told with consummate skill. The stage never lacks interest, and that interest is cumulative from the ominous opening to the inexpressibly tragic ending. Despite its literary quality, it could hardly fail of effect were it played without the music; for there is no stroke in it that is not inevitable, none that does not immensely and immediately tell. Nor must we forget to note its commanding human interest. The characters may be drawn from myth, and placed far away from us in point of chronology, but they are real men and women, of like passions with ourselves. It is this, joined with the art of the play, that exacts from the spectator such rapt attention.

"Tristan and Isolde" has been called the "Romeo and Juliet" of music. And such in fact it is. In it are at once the poetry and the tragedy of love, a stupendous appeal in music to the emotional side of man's nature. A great deal of nonsense used to be written and uttered about its alleged "wild orgies of passion," about its "glorification of sensuality," and so forth. That old unenlightened idea is almost, if not quite exploded. Mr. Filson Young puts it very pointedly when he writes that if a man can honestly say that he finds in the drama of "Tristan" any immoral taint whatever, it proves that he has not only missed its whole

spirit and intention, but has read into it things which it does not contain. Here is a plain, simple story from the old world. It tells of betrothal and betrayal; of the deep elemental love that many waters cannot quench nor the floods drown; of honour that was found of less account than love; of death that was chosen rather than shame. It is as clean and wholesome as nature; and its theme, which some would degrade, is by Wagner cut clear of every gross accretion. Though no lesson is directly taught, we may learn a hundred noble lessons from it—not one that is ignoble.

FIRST ACT

Before the opening of the stage-action certain events have occurred which it is necessary that the listener should understand. Tristan, nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, had slain Isolde's lover, Morold, an Irish chief who had come over to demand tribute. The tribute was paid, but in what form? In the form of Morold's head! Tristan himself was so grievously wounded in the encounter that he pleaded to be placed in a boat with all his weapons, and cast adrift on the sea to die.

As fate would have it, he was thrown up by the tide on the Irish coast; on that very spot held by his late enemy. Isolde found him, an unknown wanderer, and nursed him back to convalescence by her vaunted "leechcraft." To conceal his identity, he metamorphosed his name into Tantris; but Isolde recognised him by a notch in his sword corresponding exactly with a splinter found in her dead lover's head. Isolde's first impulse was to kill the man thus placed in her power. But as she lifted the sword, her aversion changed to regard, and, with a noble chivalry, she allowed Tristan to depart unharmed. Later on, Tristan was sent by his uncle as ambassador to make

peace with Ireland, and to demand the hand of Isolde for Mark to seal the bond. Isolde felt that she had been deceived and betrayed. Tristan, her own beloved, come to woo her for another!—at this her woman's heart rebelled. But the King's offer was, by her relatives, considered too good to be rejected. Isolde gave her unwilling consent, and Tristan was now bringing over to wed his uncle her whom he himself held dear. It is with the sea-voyage that the stage-action begins.

The curtain ascends to show a part of the deck of Tristan's ship on its way to Cornwall. Isolde reclines on a couch in her cabin. Rich tapestries enclose the scene. Brangäne, Isolde's attendant, is with her, to whom Isolde recounts something of her past, vowing that she will never become the wife of King Mark. An unseen sailor trolls out on the mast-head, singing of his Irish maid. The song seems to Isolde like a covert taunt aimed at herself. Fierce, conflicting thoughts take possession of her when she learns that the voyage is nearly ended; and she bursts out into an excited appeal to the elements to destroy the ship and all in it. Brangäne, to give her mistress air, draws back the curtains. The whole length of the vessel is thus revealed; and Tristan, his arms folded on his breast, his knights and his squire Kurvenal beside him, is observed standing at the helm, looking sadly across the sea. At sight of him Isolde utters a deep malediction;

Brangäne draws back the curtain

They stand entranced, gazing bewilderingly at each other. Love, not death, they discover, is what the cup of reconciliation has brought them. In a moment or two they rush into each other's arms in an overmastering burst of passion. Brangäne had *changed the draught*—had substituted for the cup of poison the potion of love, intended by Isolde's mother to ward off the evil consequences of Isolde's infatuation for Tristan.

The philtre is already working, though not yet in its full strength. But the boat bearing King Mark, coming to welcome his bride, is drawing near. The sailors' chorus, "Hail! hail! to Mark the King," is heard. Tristan and Isolde awake once more to real life. Faltering words of loving wonder, of amazement at the revelation which has come to them, fall from their lips. Their whole being vibrates under the strain of their newly-found joy; and as the curtain descends, Tristan can but ecstatically sigh out the name of Isolde, while Isolde, overcome with emotion, sinks in a faint into her attendant's arms.

SECOND ACT

The Second Act has been truly described as one vast love-duet. It opens with an introduction which leads to a scene in the Castle garden—the Castle of King Mark. Isolde's apartments are at one side, with a flight of steps descending from the door.

Isolde waits, longing for the daylight to fade when she may meet her lover. Brangäne is watching the retreat of Mark and his party on a night-hunt. She hears their horns curiously sounding in the distance; but her mistress, coming to the top of the steps, wilfully ignores the strain.

A lighted torch stands by her door, the prearranged signal for Tristan not to approach. Brangäne warns Isolde that she is being betrayed by Sir Melot, Tristan's false friend, who is seeking to curry favour with the King. Isolde will not listen. "This very night-hunt," she says, "was contrived by Melot to serve his friend." Presently, as the soft summer eve is falling, Isolde makes out the figure of the beloved drawing near. Isolde waves her kerchief to Tristan. Vainly does Brangäne implore her to leave the torch burning. Isolde seizes it. "The torch—were it the light of my life, laughing would I quench it without fear," she exclaims, as she extinguishes the flame.

Tristan rushes in, and once more they clasp each other. In a transport of unspeakable delight, they cast themselves on a bank of flowers, supremely happy, heedless of the flying moments, murmuring their ecstatic antiphon; oblivious of everything. Tristan, resting his head on Isolde's arm, beseeches the night to last eternally—

> O night of rapture, rest upon us,
> Lift our lives' remembrance from us.

But already the stars are fading, the night breezes dying. The East begins to blush. The dawn breaks—the dawn which is to bring shame and death. Still the lovers linger on the flowery bank, entranced, enshrined in nameless love, given over to themselves. More than once Brangäne comes to expostulate with them about their possible danger; but they are folded deep in the unconsciousness of bliss, and her fateful signs go unheeded. "Let me die here!" exclaims Tristan. "Let the day to death surrender!" Too long the lovers had remained in their blissful waking sleep. Treachery had too surely been at work.

Tristan's servant, Kurvenal, rushes in with an unavailing warning. Behind him follow King Mark and Melot, with a group of courtiers. Melot has played traitor in discovering the lovers to the King. He expects to be praised for his zeal. But the noble Mark is too stupefied by the staggering revelation. Turning to Tristan, whom he has loved better than a son, he pours out a flood of touching upbraidings. "Where now," he says, "has truth fled if Tristan can betray? Where now are faith and friendship fair, when from the fount of faith—my Tristan—they are lost?"

Tristan is implored to explain. Tristan is profoundly moved, but no excuse can he offer. "What thou dost ask must ever be unanswered." Tristan's only reply is, in fact, to call upon Isolde, now cower-

ing by his side, to follow him to death. He bends down slowly and kisses her forehead. Melot is furious, and, with a cry of treason, starts forward with his drawn sword. Tristan unsheathes his own steel, and turns sternly round, reproaching this so-called friend who has betrayed him. He rushes at Melot.

As they engage, Tristan, evidently seeking death, allows his guard to drop, and instantly falls, wounded, into the arms of Kurvenal. Isolde sinks weeping on his breast, and the curtain descends quickly.

THIRD ACT

The last Act opens on a scene of great beauty. We are at Karéol, Tristan's deserted castle in Brittany. Under a lime-tree in the garden lies the dying man, the devoted Kurvenal watching by his side. The blue ocean stretches below, shining like burnished steel in the sunlight. Suddenly the still morning air is pierced by the sad, haunting notes of a shepherd's pipe. The player comes and looks over the wall, asking if Tristan still sleeps. For answer, Kurvenal can only say that if Tristan wakes it will be but to take a last adieu of earth, "unless we find the lady-leech, the only one to help"—which is to say Isolde, whom Kurvenal has already summoned by a servant. "Watch the sea, and play

a merry tune should a sail come in sight," is the trusty squire's injunction to the rustic.

Tristan opens his eyes as the shepherd withdraws, playing his melancholy pipe. Racked with fever, his delirious fancies turn solely upon his darling Isolde. Half-musingly, as if to himself, he recalls the various ravishing experiences of their past together. Being told that he may yet gaze on Isolde, strength seems to return to him. But it is only for a moment or two; the excitement of that anticipated reunion proves too much for his enfeebled frame, and he falls back on the pillow exhausted.

Kurvenal, having revealed to Tristan that he has sent for Isolde as a last chance, proceeds to the watch-tower to scan the expanse of ocean. Alas! not a sail is to be seen. He returns to the sick man with the mournful news; and again the wail of the shepherd's reed is heard. Tristan, distressed at the disappointment, swoons away. Kurvenal, deeming him dead, succumbs to a paroxysm of grief. But once more the wounded man rallies; and once more eyes are directed to the blue waters. At last the shepherd's pipe gives out a lively tune. "Oh rapture! the ship from the northland is nearing."

Tristan's agitation as he learns the gladsome tidings is intense. He tries to rise, but is too weak. Isolde's ship is on the beach; her sails are down.

Isolde is up the road and through the gateway, hurrying to her love. Tristan, in a wild delirium, tears the wrappings from his wounds, drags himself from his couch, and, shrieking, "The torch is extinct! I come! I come!" staggers to meet the idol of his heart in a long, soul-stirring embrace. Alas! he falls dead in the beloved's arms. The dying eyes look a sad farewell; the lips murmur "Isolde!" and all is over.

For Isolde, too, the last hour has come. Almost speechless in the agony of her grief, she collapses in a faint on the body of her lover, imploring him to speak once again. Meanwhile, a second ship approaches. On board are King Mark, the traitor Melot, and others. Kurvenal and the shepherd barricade the gateway against the supposed enemy. The gate is stormed, the besiegers enter, and Kurvenal, in a fury of loyalty to his dead master, kills the hateful Melot. Kurvenal himself, in the confusion, receives a fatal wound, and crawls back to his master's feet, there to breathe his last.

Brangäne steps forward, endeavouring to restore Isolde; assuring her that she has made the King acquainted with the incident of the love-potion, and adding that the King, in unselfish magnanimity, has come, not to fight, but to forgive. His hope had been to see the lovers happily united. But now—"dead together: all are dead." Isolde is not yet actually dead, but the death-song is already

'Dead together! All are dead!'

on her lips. Rising to her feet, with face transformed as if a glory from heaven shone on it, she sings her "Liebestod," and falls on Tristan's body as if transfigured.

> So came their hour on them that were in life
> Tristram and Iseult: so from love and strife
> The stroke of love's own hand felt last and best
> Gave them deliverance to perpetual rest. . . .
> And these rapt forth perforce from earthly ground,
> These twain the deep sea guards and girdles round.

The two souls, bound together by that chord of human sympathy the most holy and noble—the divine passion, Love—are united in death, and thus realise far more perfectly, and in a far wider sense, all their joys. Thus ends this incomparable inspiration, the "Tristan and Isolde" of Richard Wagner.

THE HISTORY

"TRISTAN and Isolde," like "The Flying Dutchman," was the fruit of discouragement, written at one of the many acute epochs of the composer's life. Wagner had been working at his "Ring," without hope of ever seeing that mighty drama staged. He was in the direst straits of poverty, despairing, unhappy at home, thinking of ending all by his own hand. Meanwhile, the story of Tristan had been engaging his attention, and in 1854 he sketched out the text. About that time we find him writing to Liszt:

> As I have never in life felt the real bliss of love, I must erect a monument to the most beautiful of all my dreams, in which, from beginning to end, that love shall be thoroughly satiated. I have in my head "Tristan and Isolde," the simplest, but most full-blooded musical conception. With the black flag which floats at the end of it I shall cover myself to die.

To which Liszt immediately made answer: "Your 'Tristan' is a splendid idea. It may become a glorious work. Do not abandon it." Wagner had no intention of abandoning it. A subject of this kind suited his temperament too well! In Wagner's idea the highest satisfaction

and expression of the individual is only to be found in his complete absorption, and that is only possible through love. Now, a human being is both *man* and *woman* (this is Wagner, remember); and it is only when these two are united that the real human being exists. Thus it is only by love that man and woman attain to the full measure of humanity. And yet, "when we talk of a human being, such heartless blockheads are we that quite involuntarily we only think of man." The citation is direct from Wagner, who himself pointedly quoted: "Male and female created He them."

Well, as I have said, Wagner had no intention of renouncing Tristan. But he needed some incentive to go on. The incentive came from Brazil, of all places! Don Pedro, the Emperor there, was a Wagner enthusiast, and he put his enthusiasm to practical purpose by asking Wagner to write an opera for the Italian Company in Rio Janeiro. Wagner was to have whatever sum he named, if only he would go to Brazil to conduct the work himself.

The offer was tempting—tragically tempting in the circumstances—but Wagner "saw the hopelessness of trying to get Italian Opera singers to perform such a music-drama as he was about to write," and he declined it. Nevertheless, Don Pedro's friendly overtures shaped his private resolution; and, as he told Liszt in the summer of 1857, he finally deter-

mined to give up his headstrong design of completing the "Ring," and set to work seriously upon "Tristan and Isolde." That superb creation came to him as a veritable inspiration, embittered as he was by debts and disappointments, by a nervous illness, by a hopeless outlook on the future. He has an interesting note in this connection, illustrating the affinity between the characters of Tristan and Siegfried:

> The complete equality between the two consists in this, that both Tristan and Siegfried, bound by an illusion which makes this deed of theirs involuntary, woo for another their own predestined bride, and, in the false relations arising therefrom, find their doom. What in the Ring could only come to rapid utterance in the climax, becomes in Tristan the subject of a many-sided exposition; and it was this that formed my incentive to treat the story at that precise period, as a supplementary act of the great Nibelung Myth, a myth that compasses the wide relations of a world.

The First Act was finished on the last day of 1857; and in the June of the following year the Second Act was sketched, Wagner being all the time in a state of misery and unrest because of the now inevitable rupture of his home life. Venice, where he had gone for quiet, saw the finishing touches put to the Second Act. At this date, let it be recalled, Wagner was in danger of arrest as a revolutionary. Venice he regarded as a safe retreat because Venice had no German alliance. But the Saxon Government openly expressed its desire that he should be hounded

from Italy; and so, utterly broken in spirit and finances, embarrassed by many untoward situations and circumstances, he fled to Lucerne, where, in the beginning of August 1859, he completed the Third Act of "Tristan."

The finished score thus in his hands, the question of its performance had next to be faced. Difficulties of all kinds confronted the composer in this direction. In one town he could get singers but dare not appear in case of arrest; in another town he was safe from police intervention but had no chance of securing competent performers. Early in 1861 he proceeded to Vienna, hoping that there a performance might be arranged. To his inexpressible delight, the manager of the Opera accepted the score.

But here again Wagner's ill-luck pursued him. The preparations began in earnest, but the artists found the work so impracticable that, after fifty-four rehearsals, it was abandoned as hopeless! Ander, the tenor, who had been cast for Tristan, and for whom Wagner had made certain alterations in the music, said that "as fast as he learned one act he forgot another." Wagner, on the other hand, declared, later, that all the singers went through the entire work with himself at the piano.

At any rate, Vienna declined to entertain the idea of producing "Tristan." Carlsruhe, Prague, and Weimar were all tried without result. Everywhere "Tristan" was pronounced impossible. Then, in

1864, as has been told in the biographical sketch, King Ludwig came to the rescue, providing Wagner with a home at Munich, and giving him the means of having his great music dramas performed. The first result of the intimacy between king and composer was the public presentation of the work now under consideration. Hans von Bülow (whose divorced wife, the daughter of Liszt, Wagner was presently to marry) was summoned as conductor; Wagner set about looking for capable singers; and, in Munich, on the 10th of January 1865, "Tristan and Isolde," the highest exemplification of Wagner's genius, was produced before a large audience which received it with "applause of the most vigorous kind." Three performances, all equally successful, followed within as many weeks. Wagner, happy at last, if only temporarily, returned to his great drama of "The Ring."

There is no need to follow up in detail the various performances of "Tristan" which were given before the first London production (in German) at Drury Lane, under Sir Augustus Harris' direction, in June 1882. That performance, conducted by Wagner's old friend, Dr. Hans Richter, was also a great triumph. "We hear talk of fourteen or fifteen rehearsals," said a leading musical journal, "and are ready to believe that a task so heavy could not have been so well discharged without them. But, however prepared, the performance reflected immense

credit upon the company, and will be long remembered as an illustration of what is possible to well-directed energy and skill even amid the stress of a London season." At this performance the parts of Tristan and Isolde were taken respectively by Herr Winkelmann and Frau Sucher. The musical journal just quoted says that praise was especially due to these artists for their discharge of "a terribly trying task." "We are at a loss," continues the surprised critic, "to imagine how they contrived to get their respective parts into their heads, and our wonder is that their physical resources endured the strain of reproducing them. A very little of such work must tell upon the most robust performer." Much water has flowed under London Bridge since that was written. Nowadays we do not consider the task of singing through "Tristan" a test of physical endurance, though undoubtedly the title parts do involve an immense strain.

It need only be noted further that the drama was first given in English by the Carl Rosa Company at the London Lyceum in 1890. Mr. Hamish MacCunn was the conductor, and the parts of Isolde, Tristan, and Brangäne were taken respectively by Lucille Hill, Philip Brozel, and Kirkby Lunn.

THE MUSIC

When "Tristan" was first produced, and for long after, the complaint that it lacked melody was loudly heard everywhere. Its endless harmonic "melos" was too much for the amateurs, nay for the professionals of that time. There are some who, even to-day, think that the harmonic intensity of the work is excessive; and one can at least understand that position. The extreme chromatic nature of the harmony cannot fail to be remarked even by the most untutored. In the Prelude to the First Act, for example, not a single concord is heard; and that is true of the score throughout, for many pages at a time. There is only one "full close" in the entire work—at the end of Act I. But all this only adds to the "intense" or emotional character of the music and the unbroken continuity of the drama, the musical beauty of which has become clearer as the perception of harmony has become more keen. What at first seemed jumbled and meaningless, is now seen to be well ordered, designed by a master-hand; a tonal tapestry of superb web and woof.

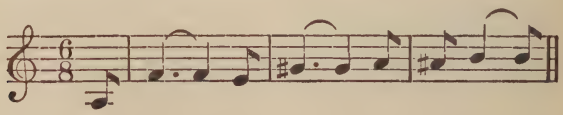
Built up of representative themes; almost destitute

of concerted music; with continued declamation for the voices, and an entire absence of form, as the term is generally understood, "Tristan" is essentially a distinctive and individual thing. Here, more than in any of his works, Wagner freed himself from all operatic convention, all restrictions of historical detail. In a letter of 1860, addressed to Francis Villot, he says of "Tristan": "Upon that work I consent to your making the severest claims deducible from my theoretic premises; not because I formed it on my system, for every theory was clean forgotten by me; but since here I moved with fullest freedom and the most utter disregard of every theoretic scruple, to such an extent that during the working out I myself was unaware how far I had outstripped my system."

Thus, then, in "Tristan" we have Wagner's art system stretched to its utmost limits, and even beyond. The complexity of the score, technically considered, is simply marvellous. Yet, such is the skill of the master, that the resultant effect is appreciable in the highest degree to the most technically uninformed listener. "So perfect," says an enthusiastic Wagnerian, "is the command over material, and so masterly the grip of [illegible]ousand component elements, that, in the result, the building rises clear and simple in outline, with no trace of the labyrinth of scaffolding that was used in its erection." This is admirably put. That is a great work of art

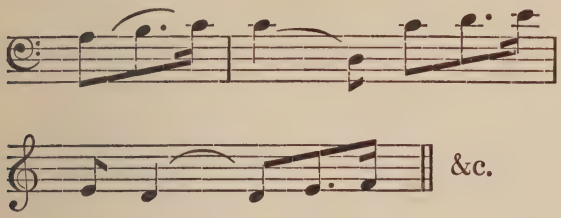
which, when it is understood, appeals to all sorts and conditions of mankind; that which appeals only to people educated in the technical elements of its construction cannot be so described. "Tristan and Isolde" adapts itself to the individual needs and inner feelings of a thousand listeners, every one of whom may be quite unlearned in the theory of the musical art. It searches the nerves and mirrors the emotions of men and women as perhaps no other music in the world does.

The music of the First Act is all more or less redolent of the sea. The wonderful Prelude (which Berlioz declared was an enigma to him) works out the principal "motive"—the Isolde motive—of the drama into various shapes of melodious beauty. It is a theme of striking impressiveness; a haunting, emotion-laden, ineffably sad phrase, in which Wagner has painted with his master-touch the feverish longing and the deep devotion of love—



Extensive use is made of this theme throughout; moreover, many of the other motives are derived from it, or bear a close resemblance to it. It appears whenever the composer wishes to suggest the idea of the love-potion or of irresistible passion. What may be called the "glance" motive is also

accorded a prominent place, alike in this Prelude and in the drama itself—

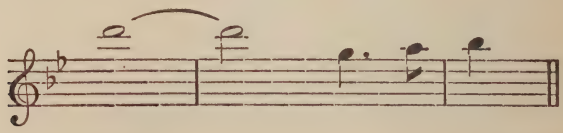


This theme, developed at length in the Prelude, is used again when the lovers exchange that meaning glance by which they learn of the passion that dominates them before the drinking of the philtre. Every bar, nay, every note of this Prelude seems weighted with emotion; its restless, mordant tones laying bare, as it were, a whole world of love and longing. No more fitting introduction to the glowing musical picture of love and despair which Wagner has painted here can well be imagined.

After the introduction, the quaint, peaceful song of the sailor as he sings of his absent Irish lass attracts attention. There is some very arresting music accompanying Tristan's first interview with Isolde, beginning with an orchestral passage voicing the heroism and the fate of the hero—a passage of really extraordinary power. The theme here is solemn and majestic, opening with a long note which "swells out until it leaps upward to die away in a wail." The song of the seamen, again, as they

reduce sail, is strongly illuminative of the atmosphere in which the whole act is enshrined: the breezy, briny atmosphere of the ocean, with its running billows and its flying foam. The lyrical parts of the opera are, all through, of exceptional, some of almost resistless beauty, giving the lie direct to the long-exploded notion that Wagner was a composer totally lacking in the gift of melody.

The Prelude to the unutterably voluptuous Second Act begins with startling abruptness. It forecasts with rare skill the events and feelings which are to immediately follow: the eager anticipation of the lovers (oh, how eager!); the soft, sweet atmosphere of the summer night, with the rustling of the leaves and the gentle murmurings of the stream. The "Day" motive strikes the note of tragedy—



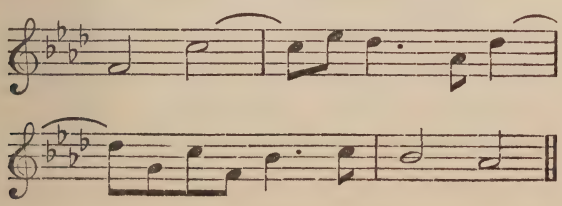
This theme is employed with great frequency throughout the drama.

Nothing could well surpass the ardent fervour and heat of this Act as expressed in the music, with its rapturous airs and its incomparable love-duet. For pathos and sweetness, it is unequalled in the whole range of operatic literature. Its long-drawn

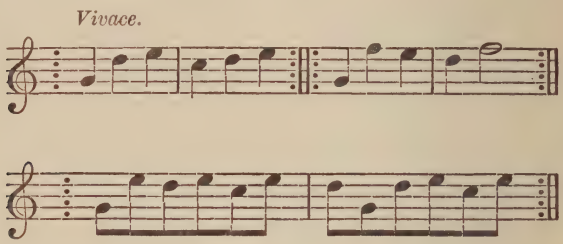
melting measures breathe all the pulsing and all the languors of consuming desire. It is of magical beauty—superb! Even the moonlight appears to be charged with melody! The Act, to speak of it as a whole, contains some of the finest effects in the musical delineation of love that have ever been produced. And when it is all over—after all this "surging music" has raked our emotions—the close comes with a single chord, as the curtain falls! Simple it is, and yet how strikingly effective!

The short Prelude to the Third Act, well known in the concert-room, is of an intensely mournful character, with its suggestions of bitter grief and loneliness. Here the Isolde motive, already quoted, assumes weird and lugubrious forms, and the effect is so poignant as to be almost painful. A splendid passage of ascending thirds enunciated by the violins, can hardly be missed by any attentive listener.

After the Prelude, one notes first the melody piped out by the shepherd—the saddest melody ever written: an afflicting and even "nightmarish" strain, heard again and again in the score, most eerily during the delirious ravings of the dying Tristan—



This profoundly dolorous air, played on the Cor Anglais, floats wofully and wearily through the hot, close, breathless atmosphere. Presently the lancinating melody changes to the following lively forms, as Isolde's ship is sighted—



There is a lovely bit of music to accompany Tristan's description of the ship which is bearing Isolde towards him. The "gentle swaying" figure of the horns and the delicious melody given to the voice combine to make an effect of richness and tenderness which, once heard, can never be forgotten. But Isolde's swan-song, the well-known "Liebestod," is the masterpiece of the drama. That is the most superlatively beautiful of all Wagner's creations—one of the most consummate pieces of music in existence, indeed. This number is identical with the latter portion of the great love-duet in the Second Act, a magnificent climax and coda being added. Wagner's idea obviously was to produce a pensive echo of the former happy union of the lovers; to call up a tristful remem-

brance of lost bliss. It is a marvellous scene altogether.

Of the gorgeous orchestration it is hardly possible to speak. To convey any idea of that "weltering symphonic mass" in words is a task which has baffled scores of writers. Only when it is heard can its splendour be appreciated to the full. A distinguished American critic may be drawn upon to express what so many have felt and have yet been unable to express. He says: "If a painter should discover and use a new spectrum with colours never before seen by mortal eyes, he would do for the sense of sight what Wagner has done in 'Tristan' for the ear. What a marvellous variety of tone-colours, many of them entirely new on the musical palette, has he lavished on this score! Yet all this sensuous beauty is placed entirely in the service of the dramatic emotion which it is intended to intensify." No writer can better these words. That glorious web of melody, woven from the individual orchestral parts—who shall speak of it fittingly? Louis Ehlert, in one of his letters, says: "When in the Second Act Isolde is awaiting her lover, when the orchestra throbs with a thousand pulses and every nerve becomes a sounding tone, I am no longer the man I am through the rest of the year, nor am I artistically and morally a responsible being: I am a Wagnerian." Thousands who have listened to

the music of "Tristan" have felt just like that. And no wonder! As Mr. J. F. Runciman has truly said, there never was music poured out at so white a white heat. It is music written in the most modern, most pungent, and raciest vernacular, with utter impatience of style, of writing merely in an approved manner. It is beyond criticism—of all Wagner's works that which most arrests and enchains the imagination.

THE MEISTERSINGERS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WALTHER VON STOLZING, *Knight of Franconia* (*Bass*)
EVA, *Pogner's Daughter* (*Soprano*)
MAGDALENA, *her Nurse* (*Soprano*)
DAVID, *Hans Sachs' Apprentice* (*Tenor*)
THE MASTERSINGERS :—

1. Hans Sachs, *Shoemaker and Poet* (*Bass*)
2. Pogner, *a Goldsmith* (*Bass*)
3. Beckmesser, *the Town Clerk* (*Baritone*)
4. Vogelgesang, *a Furrier* (*Bass*)
5. Nachtigal, *a Tinsmith* (*Bass*)
6. Kothner, *a Baker* (*Bass*)
7. Ortel, *a Soapmaker* (*Bass*)
8. Zorn, *a Pewterer* (*Tenor*)
9. Moses, *a Tailor* (*Tenor*)
10. Eisslinger, *a Grocer* (*Tenor*)
11. Folz, *a Brazier* (*Bass*)
12. Schwarz, *a Weaver* (*Bass*)

A Night Watchman (*Bass*)
Chorus of Apprentices (*Altos and Tenors*)
The Congregation in Church (*Chorus of Sopranos, Altos, Tenors, and Basses*)
Chorus of Neighbours, Old Citizens, Shoemakers, Tailors, Bakers, and the General Populace

THE REAL MEISTER-SINGERS

BEFORE proceeding to outline the story of Wagner's great humorous opera, it seems expedient to give the reader some account of the real "Mastersingers"—the artisan poets of Germany, who had a certain affinity with, and were yet entirely different from, the troubadours of France. It is not so long since the craft became extinct. Twelve old Meistersingers held regular meetings in a little inn at Ulm as late as 1830. By 1839 the number had dwindled to four; and the quartet solemnly decided that the society of Mastersingers be disbanded for ever. It is said that the last of these interesting survivals died in 1876.

The Meistersingers had their origin in the early part of the fourteenth century, and their golden age was about the time of the Lutheran Reformation. A versifying mania had taken possession of the lower classes. As one historian phrases it, blacksmiths, weavers, shoemakers, doctors, and schoolmasters sought to mend their fortunes by making verses. Companies of these persons formed themselves into guilds or corporations, calling themselves "Master-

singers," and holding periodical gatherings at which they criticised each other's productions. They composed their verses in conformity with certain strict guild rules; accuracy, industry, and painstaking care, rather than an unfettered expression of the true spirit of poetry, were the main features of the Mastersingers' art. "Every fault was marked, and he who had the fewest faults was awarded the prize and permitted to take apprentices." When his apprenticeship was over the young man was admitted to the corporation as a full-fledged Meistersinger.

Expert writers who have studied the subject have shown that there was a guild of Meistersingers at Mainz as early as 1311. The idea caught the popular fancy, and before the fourteenth century was out, few towns in Germany were without their guild of Meistersingers. It was, however, at Nuremberg, and in the time of Hans Sachs (1494–1575), that the school attained its highest development. Nuremberg, which still preserves much of its ancient dignity, was in fact the heart and shrine of the mastersong. The circumstance is not forgotten to-day. Pilgrims find their way to the typical, mediæval town; visit St. Catherine's, where the formal contests of the Meistersingers were held; see the quaintly decorated cabinet that hangs on the church wall and bears the portraits of four "Meisters"; and indulge in dreams of the dead days, as they pass through the streets once trod by Albert Dürer and Hans Sachs.

Who does not know Longfellow's fine poem on Nuremberg?

Here Hans Sachs, the cobbler poet, laureate of the gentle craft,
Wisest of the Twelve Wise Masters, in huge folios sang and laughed.

. . . . . .

Vanished is the ancient splendour, and before my dreamy eye
Wave these mingled shapes and figures like a faded tapestry.
Not thy Councils, not thy Kaisers, win for thee the world's regard,
But thy painter Albrecht Dürer, and Hans Sachs, thy cobbler-bard.

Sachs makes a considerable figure in Wagner's comedy, and it is therefore of interest to note that he was an historical character, not a mere creature of the imagination. No fewer than 6048 works are attributed to this cobbler-bard, 4275 of which are "Meisterlieder." Whatever he touched seems to have become either music or poetry under his hand! That Wagner idealised him is obvious enough, for no shoemaker could have been the philosopher, poet, artist, commoner, and genial Romanticist that Sachs is made to appear in this engaging drama. But our only concern here is to emphasise the fact that Sachs walked the earth in his day, and took a leading part in these competitions of the Meistersingers which Wagner has so humorously satirised.

So, too, with other Meistersingers in the opera —Pogner, Kothner, Zorn, Nachtigal, Beckmesser, and the rest—their names are all to be found in the

treatise of Christoph Wagenseil, published in 1697. From this learned tome Wagner admittedly gained his information about the old Meistersingers, their contests, and their quaint manners. But he worked up the story in his own way, to suit his own particular purpose. The charming love episode, for example, is entirely his conception, for no real-life candidate for admission to the Meistersingers' guild ever won his bride as a prize in the song contest. This is another tribute to the dramatic genius of the master whose delightful comedy I now proceed to describe.

Walther and Eva at the Church at Nuremberg

FIRST ACT

THE period is the middle of the sixteenth century. When the curtain rises, we see the interior of St. Catherine's Church at Nuremberg. The choir is in front, and the scene is so arranged that the last rows of seats in the nave are visible at the back of the stage. The precise time is the afternoon of the eve of St. John's feast (Midsummer Day), and the assembled congregation are singing the last verse of a hymn to the Baptist. During the singing a quiet flirtation is going on between Eva Pogner, the daughter of Veit Pogner (a rich goldsmith, one of the most substantial members of the Meistersingers' guild), and Walther von Stolzing, a young knight from Franconia. We see Walther leaning against a pillar, evidently paying scant heed to the service. He has fallen in love at first sight, and the charming Eva is by no means averse to his advances.

When the congregation has dispersed, Walther approaches Eva, enters into conversation with her, and asks if she is married. Her maid, Magdalena, explains that she is to be married on the following day, though she does not yet know who is to be the bridegroom. It must be understood here that one

of the usual singing contests has been arranged. Walther has already made the acquaintance of Eva's father; but Pogner, concerned about the dignity of the Mastersingers' craft, has declared that his daughter shall marry the successful candidate in the coming vocal competition.

Walther decides that he will enter the lists, if necessary. Meantime he will approach the maiden herself directly, if clandestinely. Eva shows herself not unwilling to listen. With womanly ingenuousness she feigns to have left her scarf behind, and Magdalena (for "two's company but three's none") sets off to find it. She returns before the lovers have had their talk out, and is despatched once more, this time in search of a brooch. The brooch is secured, but still the lovers are whispering in each other's ears. Magdalena accordingly goes away a third time—now for a hymn-book. Then, when she has finally returned, Walther openly avows his passion for Eva. Magdalena is somewhat shocked that a love affair should be conducted in church in so unblushing a manner; and she interposes to say that until the singing competition has been held it will be impossible to tell who is to be Eva's husband.

At this stage David, an apprentice to Hans Sachs, the shoemaker and poet, arrives with other apprentices of the Mastersingers to prepare seats for the forthcoming examination in song. David, let it be remarked, is Magdalena's lover. Walther realises

that, if he is to have the slightest chance of gaining Eva's hand, he must enter the contest. He announces this intention, and Magdalena refers him to David, who, she says, in effect, will coach him up for his examination by the Mastersingers. After the two women have left the church David begins his instructions, rattling off a ludicrous description of the various technicalities required to produce a correct "mastersong." The candidate, it seems, must become a singer and recognise at sight all the different tones: the "short," the "long," the "fragrant hawthorn," the "frog," the "cinnamon stalk," the "faithful pelican," and so on—fanciful names given by the cult to the various musical notes. Next, he must show himself a poet and write words to the air. Finally he is required to produce something in which both words and music are his own, and in which only seven breaches of recognised rule are allowed.

Before the "coaching" business is finished, the booth usually erected for the "marker" in the contest has been set up, and the Mastersingers now enter. First come Pogner (Eva's father) and Beckmesser, a pompous elderly widower, who presumes to aspire to the hand of Eva. Beckmesser, being the eldest of the Masters, has been appointed marker for the occasion; his duty being to sit in a curtained box and note every infraction of established rule which may occur in the candidate's song.

The Masters being all assembled, Pogner tells of his intention to bestow his daughter on the victorious candidate in the ensuing contest. Beckmesser is naturally anxious, and when Walther is presently brought forward as a candidate, the marker eyes him with uneasy suspicion. Pogner, it should be said, has left his daughter the option of refusing the hand of the successful contestant, but he insists that she must marry inside the Mastersingers' guild. This plan of his gives rise to discussion—some approving it; others, Beckmesser among them, disapproving. Hans Sachs, now one of the assembly, quizzes Beckmesser on the point, remarking that *they* at least are too old to be seriously considered as aspirants for Eva's hand. There is much noise and commotion over this discussion, especially on the part of the apprentices.

But now Walther is about to be heard. He intimates that love and nature have been chosen as his theme, and proceeds to sing his song. Being self-taught and quite unfamiliar with the traditional rigid rules, he proves himself entirely incorrect according to the laws of the guild. Beckmesser, who has been very busy over his slate, declares that he never heard such a disgraceful exhibition; that there are positively more mistakes than he can keep note of. The genial, sympathetic Sachs wishes to hear Walther out to the end, insisting that, though not according to rule, his song is truly poetical;

but the youth is declared to have "mis-sung and failed," and the meeting dissolves in confusion. Walther vainly endeavours to make himself heard: Sachs intercedes for him, the other Masters protesting; Beckmesser scolds and points out more faults; and Pogner shows himself deeply distressed lest his daughter's already engaged affections make it impossible for him to carry out his novel scheme. Such is the situation when the curtain falls.

SECOND ACT

The Second Act passes in one of Nuremberg's quaintly picturesque streets, with Pogner's house on one side and Sachs' on the other. It is now the eve of St. John's festival, and the summer night is advancing. The apprentices are putting up the shutters, singing and chaffing each other (particularly David) the while. Pogner and Eva enter, returning from a walk; and in the conversation that follows Pogner discovers the state of his daughter's affections. From Magdalena, her attendant (Pogner having now gone into the house), Eva learns of her lover's failure. She determines to ask Sachs for advice.

Presently the shoemaker seats himself at his work in the door of his shop. "The balmy air of the evening, the scent of the elder tree, turn his

thoughts to the poetry which he heard at the trial. What though it outraged the rules of the Masters, and even puzzled him? Within it lay real power. The singer (Walther) sang not to meet rules, but because utterance was demanded by his feelings. Let the Masters rage; Hans Sachs is well pleased." Such is the substance of the famous monologue in this Act.

Eva emerges from her father's house, and, in a delightful scene with Sachs, suggests that, to escape marriage with the vain old Beckmesser, she would gladly marry Sachs himself.[1] The shoemaker (though he loves Eva) discourages the idea and leaves her after learning, what he has suspected, that she is really in love with Walther. Next moment Eva is in the arms of the Franconian knight. Walther, full of resentment against the Masters, proposes an immediate elopement. Eva consents, vowing she will have no one but him. Sachs, however, from his shop-door, has overheard much of the conversation. He has other plans for compassing the happiness of the pair, and he resolves to thwart their present scheme. Consequently, as they are about to depart, he throws the strong light of his lantern on them where they are standing. They slink into the shadow, and just as they are proceeding to retire

[1] It is well known that the real Sachs, when past middle age, was attracted by a very young girl, whom he married, and that he lived happily with her till he died.

The Night Watchman

down another street, Beckmesser, lute in hand, approaches for the purpose of serenading Eva. As the old "marker" begins to tune his instrument, Sachs brings his bench into the doorway and starts work, singing lustily, and pounding vigorously at his last.

In answer to Beckmesser's inquiry about this prodigious noise, Sachs replies that he is trying to finish the shoes which Beckmesser himself had demanded of him that very day. Here Magdalena, personating Eva, shows herself at the window, and Beckmesser endeavours to sing his song to her. He is very effectually prevented by the racket still kept up by the shoemaker. This leads to an agreement between the pair: Sachs will act as "marker" while Beckmesser sings, the shoemaker correcting each error by a stroke of his hammer.

A most comical scene ensues. Sachs had remarked that Beckmesser's shoes would be finished before Beckmesser's song. And so it turns out. The shoemaker's blows come fast and furious; Beckmesser, in his rage, sings louder and louder. At last the neighbours, roused by the din, come out to put a stop to it. A general *mêlée* follows; and David, realising that Beckmesser has been serenading his sweetheart, Magdalena, attacks the old fellow with a cudgel. In the midst of the uproar Sachs emerges from his shop, seizes Walther by the arm (he had resolved to escape with Eva

during the confusion), takes him into his own house, and sends Eva across the way to her father. The night-watchman's horn is heard in the distance, the crowd disperses, the beaten Beckmesser limps away, and the curtain falls on the quiet moonlit street.

THIRD ACT

The Third Act opens in the interior of Sachs' shop. The shoemaker is seen in reverie, with a volume resting on his knees. It is the morning of the eventful day. David, his apprentice, fails to rouse Sachs out of his brooding humour, though there is a diverting scene between the pair, in which David, being asked to sing the festival lesson, forgets himself so far as to begin the verses to St. John to the tune of Beckmesser's serenade. When Sachs is left alone, he breaks into the second great monologue of the opera, "Wahn, Wahn; überall Wahn" (Madness, madness; everywhere madness), a fine expressive piece, the entire text of which must be read in order to be understood. At its conclusion Walther enters, descending from the room in which he has passed the night. He informs Sachs of "a wondrous, lovely dream" he has had, in which an idea for a song has been communicated to him. Sachs bids him put it into verse and make a "mastersong" of it. Walther, hesitating at first,

Eva at Sach's the Shoemaker's

obeys. He begins, in fact, the song by which he is subsequently hailed the victor in the contest. Sachs stops him at various points with hints and reproving instructions.

Finally the shoemaker's entire approval is gained; he puts the song on paper, and the two leave the room together to prepare for the festival. Beckmesser now comes limping by, and, seeing the room empty, enters. His eye catches the paper which Sachs has left on the table. He concludes that the shoemaker is the author of the newly-written song—that by it he means to compete for the hand of Eva. Hearing footsteps approaching, Beckmesser hastily pockets the manuscript, and, on Sachs entering, accuses him of rivalry and treachery. To Beckmesser's surprise, Sachs tells him that he may have the song, adding that under no circumstances will he claim it as his own.

The old pedant, knowing Sachs' fame as a poet, is overjoyed, thinking himself now assured of success. The events of the previous night, he says, had driven his own song quite out of his head. Might he use this one? "Certainly," replies the shoemaker, "but be careful how you study it, for it is not easy." "And you will promise me never to say that it is yours?" "Willingly!" And so exit Beckmesser, for the time being a happy man.

Eva, in her betrothal dress, now arrives, protesting that something is amiss with one of her

shoes. Sachs, smiling incredulously, pretends to put it right. Walther, richly clad, comes next, standing spell-bound at the sight of Eva. Sachs suggests that a third stanza might be added to the prize song. This is done, and Walther sings it. Eva, "deeply moved, throws herself into Sachs' arms, saying that she has reached a new understanding of him and herself. David and Magdalena enter, and Sachs announces that a mastersong has been made. He promotes David from apprentice to journeyman, that he may hear the song, which an apprentice could not honour, and then he invites Eva to speak."

The company now start for the field of contest, and the scene changes to a meadow by the riverside. Various guilds with their banners arrive; last of all the Mastersingers. Pogner and his daughter appear together, and are assigned the place of honour on the platform. The beloved Sachs, after being greeted by one of his own songs, addresses the assembly, intimating the terms of the competition. Beckmesser, as the senior candidate, is the first to be called. He has been seeking in vain to master the appropriated song, and he is in the last depths of despair, trembling in every limb. He is perfectly certain no one will understand his song, but he relies on Sachs' popularity.

Alas! whether Sachs' writing was indistinct, or his own brain was muddled—probably both—Beck-

messer makes such arrant nonsense of the words that at last the listeners burst into a united roar of laughter. Beckmesser, in a fury, turns on Sachs, declaring that, since the song is his, *he* is the author of the fiasco. Sachs, of course, promptly denies the paternity of the song, adding that Beckmesser best knows how he came by it. It is a very good song when properly sung, says the shoemaker, in effect. And then, looking round the assembly, he picks out Walther and asks him to give the correct rendering.

The young knight comes forward and sings his song. By popular acclamation he is awarded the prize, and with it Eva's hand. Walther, satisfied with having gained his bride, is for declining the added glory of being invested with the insignia of the Meistersingers' guild. Sachs, however, points out to him that it would be rude to refuse the honour. The victor yields, whereupon Eva snatches the laurel from her lover and places it on Sachs' brow; and the curtain descends as the people joyfully acclaim the worthy shoemaker, who is in reality the central figure in the drama.

THE HISTORY

WAGNER sketched out "The Meistersingers" at Marienbad in 1844, soon after he had finished "Tannhäuser." The latter was a serious opera; "The Meistersingers" was to be a comic pendant to it. The notion of Wagner writing a homely comic opera seems almost as incongruous as the notion of the author of "Don Quixote" writing a Bible Commentary. It is the very last thing we should suspect Wagner of doing. Yet he did it, and did it purposely, too. He wanted to show, as he has expressly avowed, that however visionary his ideas of the music-drama might be, he could nevertheless turn his hand successfully to the composition of a work founded on the simplest materials; a work which anybody could understand; a work at which even the commercially-minded manager need not shy. In a word, Wagner meant "The Meistersingers" to be an essentially popular opera, and he realised his intention.

But what a process of evolution it passed through! Sketched out, as we have said, in 1844, it was not completed until 1867, twenty-three years after the subject had taken shape in the

composer's mind. The poem itself was finished in Paris in 1862. The music, too, was begun in that year; but Wagner had shortly afterwards to fly from his creditors, and it was not until he had secured the protection and practical help of the "mad" Ludwig that he was able to bring the opera to a hearing. Eighteen years of enforced exile had been patiently endured while "The Meistersingers" was maturing—years of bitter struggle with Fate and finances; years when the very necessaries of life were often wanting, and Hope, the medicine of the miserable, showed hardly one of those "pleasures" of which the neglected poet has sung. "I am in a miserable condition, and can with difficulty persuade myself that I can go on like this. Would it not be better to put an end to this disgraceful kind of life?" Thus the composer, deep in despair, wrote to his friend Liszt.

And while he thus wrote, the charming music of this, one of the very best comic operas of modern times, was filling his mind! He had almost decided to throw up his profession and seek his bread in India as a tutor; yet, in the midst of all that despondency, all that distress connected with the sordid affairs of the material life, he manages to perfect this great opera of "The Meistersingers," as great in its own particular vein as the "Ring" itself! Truly has one said, "Never was the might of Wagner's genius more apparent."

Ludwig, as we have learned, "took up" Wagner in 1864. This was two years after he had finished the poem of "The Meistersingers." Under the happy conditions which the King thus established, the score of the opera was proceeded with. But it was not all plain sailing. Even kings (mad kings) have their troubles. Ludwig was charged (such is the actual truth) with endangering the interests of the State by his advocacy and protection of this revolutionary composer. On the other hand, Wagner himself was popularly supposed to be encouraging Ludwig in his wild extravagances—a delusion which seemed to gain support from Ludwig's project of building a special theatre for the production of Wagner's works. Bayreuth, as we all know, was the practical result of that idea.

Meanwhile, Wagner found things becoming so uncomfortable for him at Munich that he left for Switzerland in 1865, and once more became a wanderer. The "Ring" appears to have been the chief cause of the trouble. Here is an interesting quotation from Wagner himself:

> Now that I and my project had been placed in broad daylight, all the ill-will that had hitherto lain in ambush made an open attack in full force. I even tried to divert public attention from the whole affair by spending a hard-won and much-needed rest on the completion of "Die Meistersinger," a work with which I should not appear to be quitting the customary groove of performances at the theatre.

Thus "The Meistersingers" was now awaiting the favourable time when the absurd, ill-founded feeling against its composer should have died down. That time came in 1868. Wagner then returned to Munich to superintend the rehearsals of the work, and the first performance took place at the Royal Court Theatre on the 21st of June. It was a great success—peculiar indeed, among Wagnerian music-dramas, in being a success from the start. Von Bülow conducted (he whose divorced wife was presently to become Frau Wagner), and that same Dr. Hans Richter who is still happily with us was the chorus-master. It is well known that the first complete score of "The Meistersingers" was copied out by Richter, who stayed with Wagner for the purpose. Next year (1869) the opera was heard at Weimar and Dresden. Berlin staged it in 1870, and after that fresh towns were continually added to the list. The first London performance took place in May 1882, when Richter was conducting a season of German Opera. Strangely enough, it was not given at Bayreuth until 1888.

There is so much to be said about every individual music-drama of Wagner's, and one feels the imbecility of trying to say everything under a section heading! One certainly wants to note how Wagner, in "The Meistersingers," is supposed to have reproduced himself in the character of Walther. He has not, in set words, given us any ground for such

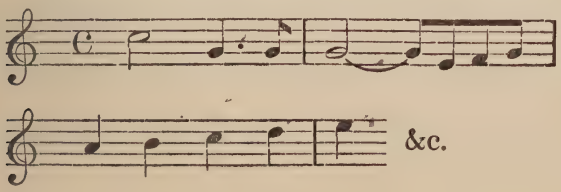
an idea. Nevertheless, we may readily agree with an acute American critic that the composer really designed Walther to represent, like himself, the spirit of progress in music; while, in the Mastersingers, he embodied the spirit of pure pedantry.

"These two powers," says the American critic, "have always been at war in the world of art, and always will. Theoreticians and critics publish rules which they deduce from the practice of the great artists. The next original genius who arrives has something new to say, and says it in a new way. . . . Wagner, in 'The Meistersingers,' has shown us the spirit of progress in its jubilant youth, scoffing at the established rule of which it is ignorant. One of the first lessons of the symbolism of the comedy is that a musician, or any other artist, must master what has already been learnt of his art before he can advance beyond it." But who wants to think of symbolism in listening to a comic opera? Critics and commentators may debate themselves blind as to whether Hamlet was mad or only feigning madness. What cares the spectator? The play's the thing—or the opera!

THE MUSIC

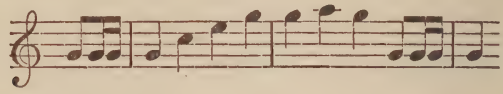
Any notice of the music of "The Meistersingers" must necessarily, in a work of this kind, be somewhat brief; for there are so many points of almost equal importance that a detailed analysis would mean many pages of writing and musical illustration.

True to his theories, Wagner gives us here no separate songs or detached movements; but one piece leads into another from beginning to end of an Act. The Overture, as in most of the composer's great music-dramas, is a sort of musical epitome of the entire work. This masterly piece of orchestration tells of the guild, with its cast-iron rules; of Walther's attempts to gain admission to its conservative circle; and of the ultimate victory of Art over all inartistic barriers. At the opening of the Overture a stately melody is given out, known as the Meistersingers' *motiv*, and representing the guild with all its mannerisms and formalities:

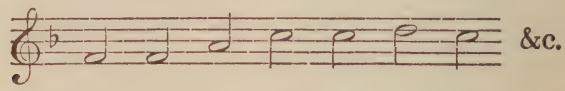


&c.

A few measures farther on, the sonorous grandeur of the Meistersingers' March arrests the attention:



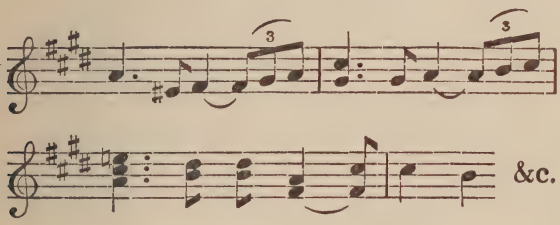
The breadth and wealth of sound which go to make up this part are truly superb: bar follows bar with an ever-increasing richness of melody and orchestration which has rarely been surpassed even by Wagner himself. The second theme is of peculiar interest, because Wagner evolved it from the opening notes of a genuine Meistersinger tune:



This was Heinrich Müglin's melody, known among the Mastersingers as the "Long Tone." The listener should understand that Wagner made use of real Meistersinger tunes in his drama, his object being to typify the art represented by the Masters. On the other hand, he employed themes of his own to express the uprising of emotion, as opposed to pedantic rule, in the breast of the young knight Walther. Thus we have the prize love-song of Eva's admirer, thrown into the bright key of E major immediately after a transposition from C:

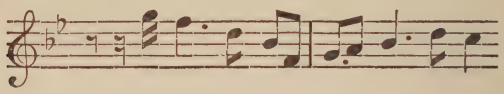
Out of this and similar thematic material the Overture is built. An ever-increasing undercurrent of excitement leads up to the climax, when the Meistersingers' *motiv* bursts forth again in all its glory. The character of the whole Prelude is, in short, the character of the drama itself—"a contest of forces with a final reconciliation."

The First Act opens with quite an old-fashioned chorale, sung by choir and congregation. When Eva and Walther are left by themselves for their stolen interview, the "Spring" theme, which plays so important a part in the score, is heard:



The character of the music changes when David, Sachs' assistant, enters; the idea being to represent in lively strains the gay, young, irresponsible life of the Meistersinger apprentices. This is clear from the fact that, with the entrance of the Meistersingers, at the close of the scene with David, the music again assumes a comparatively serious cast. When Walther is presented for the contest by Pogner we hear for the first time the following

arresting theme of his knighthood, a theme which henceforward accompanies him throughout the score:

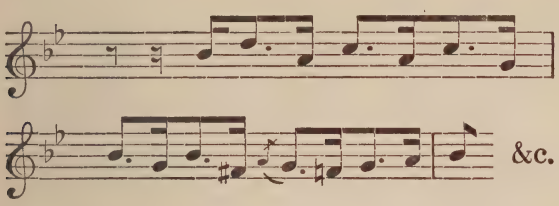


&c.

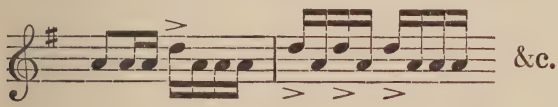
Replying to Kothner's question as to who was his instructor (the Meistersingers spoke of twelve Minnesingers as their masters and models), Walther sings the lyric, "Am stillen Herd," a most exquisite melody, foremost in beauty in all the work. The subsequent trial song "throbs throughout with the Spring theme," above noted. Beckmesser's discomfiture and ill-temper over Walther's candidature are admirably expressed by certain dissonances in the orchestra; while few can fail to remark the "kindly theme" introduced as Sachs speaks. The Act, as we have seen, ends in general confusion, and the closing bars of the score are notable for the humorous way in which the bassoons, the clowns of the orchestra, satirise the "ponderous dignity" of the Meistersingers' *motiv.*

The music of the Second Act is "simplicity itself" up to the appearance of Pogner and Eva. The score is "rich with themes already made known," but when the goldsmith tells his daughter of the plan he has conceived for the disposal of her hand, we hear for the first time, what may be called the Nuremberg *motiv*, which is to be regarded as ex-

pressing the pride of the citizens in their quaint old town:

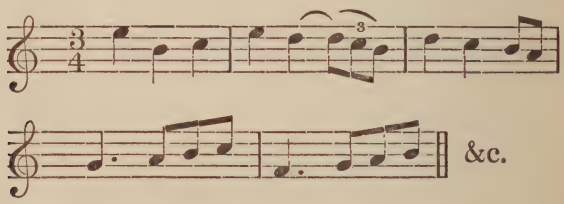


Familiar themes, "employed to make a mood-picture of great beauty," illustrate the scene between Sachs and Eva. When Walther enters, the knight theme is repeated; and a tender love *motiv* appeals to the ear as Eva declares her eternal faith in him. Some lovely music accompanies the approach of the night watchman; and the development of the uproar in the street is "worked out with immense contrapuntal skill." Note, in particular, how the composer represents the beating of Beckmesser:



When the street is finally cleared of the crowd, the music of the summer night "steals back in an ethereal whisper," and the Act ends with "one of those beautiful points of repose which Wagner knew so well how to make after a movement of extreme agitation."

The Prelude to the Third Act has been described as marking the highest point of the drama. Here, in a creation of marvellous beauty and expressiveness, the composer paints for us the soul of the poet-cobbler, moved to its deepest being. The wonderfully stirring "Wahn" *motiv* is associated with the great monologue of the Act in which Sachs broods over the eagerness of poor mortals to engage in strife. The scene between Walther and the shoemaker is full of luscious melody. And then, who can miss the "mastersong" which finally wins for Walther the prize?



The scene following Eva's entrance in her betrothal dress is full of delicate characterisation. There is a beautiful passage for the recitation of Sachs; and the quintet which follows, written in the familiar operatic manner—that is, in purely lyric style—is generally allowed to be "one of the loveliest conceptions of this extraordinary work." In the last scene the leading themes of the opera are woven into a marvellous web, twining and winding themselves round Sachs' address, as if all mankind were thronging to his side.

What shall be said further? A hearing of "The Meistersingers" emphasises several points. One remarks chiefly the lyric quality of the work—the charming songs scattered throughout, most of them detachable from the context. We note also the important part which the chorus plays as compared with other works of the master. Again, we see the skill with which Wagner has "caught and reproduced the atmosphere of sixteenth-century Nuremberg without sacrificing a jot of the absolute modernity of his style." The complexity and elaboration of the score are further points of interest. Finally there is the orchestration. Wagner used to be called one of the noisiest of modern composers. One outstanding feature of "The Meistersingers" is, however, the moderation and discretion of its accompaniments. The instrumentation is always rich, often sonorous, very seldom noisy. For example, in the first two pages of the First Act the full orchestra is only used twice—each time for a few bars; and similar reticence is the characteristic of the whole work. The ingenuity and novelty of the treatment of the wind instruments are above all praise.

THE RING

THE HISTORY

In 1851 Liszt was conducting the small but excellent opera at Weimar. That year Wagner, as I have already partly quoted, wrote: "At the end of my last stay in Paris, when, ill, miserable, and despairing, I sat brooding over my fate, my eye fell on the score of my 'Lohengrin,' totally forgotten by me. Suddenly I felt something like compassion that this music should never sound from off the death-pale paper. Two words I wrote to Liszt; his answer was the news that preparations were made for the performance on the largest scale the limited means of Weimar would permit. . . . Success was his reward, and with this success he now approaches me saying, 'Behold, we have come so far; now create us a new work, that we may go still further.'"

Wagner's response to this call was the great drama of "The Ring," originally intended for Weimar, but never performed there. He was just thirty-five when he began the gigantic work; for it was in 1848 that he wrote the poem on the death of the mythical Siegfried. In order to make that poem perfectly clear, he realised that a dramatic

rendering of antecedent events was necessary. He therefore wrote "The Young Siegfried," and "The Valkyrie," prefacing this trilogy by a "grand introductory play" then called "The Rape of the Rhinegold." I quote again from one of his communications of 1851. "I propose," he wrote, "to produce my myth in three complete dramas, preceded by a lengthy Prelude. . . . At a specially appointed Festival, I propose, at some future time, to produce those three dramas, with their Prelude, in the course of three days and a fore-evening." This plan was not realised until 1876, twenty-five years later, at Bayreuth, by which time the original titles had been made to stand as we now know them, namely, Fore-evening: "The Rhinegold"; First Day: "The Valkyrie"; Second Day: "Siegfried"; Third Day: "The Dusk of the Gods."

The stupendous trilogy is a setting, to Wagner's own libretto, of the Nibelungenlied, with a liberal infusion of Norse mythology. These old legends of the Nibelung dwarfs who dwell in the bowels of the earth, of the Rhine-maidens, of Wotan, Freia, and the other gods and goddesses who inhabited Walhalla, of their dealings with heroic mortals such as Siegfried and Siegmund, and so on, attracted Wagner as affording the finest opportunities for carrying out his convictions on the subject of musical drama. The stories have been dear to Northern nations for full a thousand years, and their fascination seems to

mellow rather than decay with age. As Sir Hubert Parry has said, even the cold spirit of twentieth-century analysis and criticism grows warm under their influence; for the mysticism, which formed so much of their charm, is no vague cloudland of dreams and sensational episodes, but an expression of the feelings and reflections of a noble and warm-hearted race of human beings on the circumstances of life and the mysteries of the world. The stories as wholes are an attempt to explain, either in allegorical or direct narrative way, their idea of the origin of things and the forces of nature, and the inevitable fate which hangs over all. They are just such as a composer of Wagner's calibre wanted; for the characters and situations and general outlines of the legends are of the grandest and most typical kind, and express deep truths of human nature without either complication or commonplace.

One hears much about the heavy demands which "The Ring" makes on its hearers, as well as its performers. This is, to a large extent, the outcome of the countless efforts of writers to "explain" its supposed inner meaning, to analyse and unravel its scores, with their extensive agglomeration of *motifs* or guiding themes, each with its own particular significance. Yet Wagner used to say that he required nothing from the public but healthy senses and a human heart. Of course he meant "The Ring" to carry a "message"; and it is in trying to expound

this message that commentators advance such a conflicting variety of views. For this confusion Wagner himself is partly to blame. Scattered throughout his voluminous prose works and published correspondence are many invaluable "explanations" and suggestions regarding all his music-dramas, but the trouble is that they do not always agree. Wagner, versatile and mercurial, was, as Mr. George Bernard Shaw has acutely pointed out, a different being every hour. He explained matters according to his momentary mood—a Schopenhauerian one hour, a semi-Christian the next. As regards "The Ring," his contradictions are readily accounted for by the fact that the work engaged him for a long number of years, during which his views naturally underwent many changes, with resulting contradictions and inconsistencies in exposition. We may, however, safely take the following as expressing in a few words what he really meant: "My Nibelung-poem," he writes in 1854, "shows Nature in her naked truth, with all her innate opposites, whose infinitely varied meetings include the shock of mutual repulsion. . . . The whole course of the poem shows the necessity of recognising the change, the diversity, the multiplicity, the eternal newness of reality and life, and yielding place to it."

There is no need to make any mystery about the subject; no need to involve it in cloudy discussions about philosophy and metaphysics and all the rest.

It is a subject not necessarily implying any great strain on the imagination such as is too often assumed. In plain language, it shows the struggle of free love and human impulse against the fetters of conventional laws, and against the sway of wealth and splendour. It is essentially a drama of to-day, though dressed up in all the heathen paraphernalia of gods, giants, dwarfs, water-maidens, Valkyries, &c., &c. The spectator will readily recognise in it a picture of the world through which he is himself fighting his way. The dwarfs, giants, and gods may be regarded as dramatisations of the three main orders of mankind—dwarfs, the instinctively lustful, greedy, grabbing people; giants, the patient, industrious, stupid money-lovers; gods, the clever, moral intellectuals, who make and rule States and communities. The Rhine-maidens are the nature-lovers who admire the gold for its beauty, not for its commercial value. Alberich is the capitalist, who forswears the love he cannot win by reason of his unamiable personality. He carries off the gold to turn it into money and the means of acquiring vast wealth through the labour of millions driven by starvation to accept his terms.

The giants, on the other hand, are willing to buy love and gold honestly, with patient, manual drudgery in the service of the higher powers. These higher powers, who, in comparison with the dwarfs and giants, may be called gods, are the talented moral

beings whose aims reach beyond the mere satisfaction of their appetites and personal affections. In order to carry out their projects for the advancement of the world from a state of savagery, they make laws and enforce them by the punishment of the disobedient. In time these laws cease to be in accordance with the ever-widening and developing ideas of the gods. But their law must be preserved at all costs, even when it no longer represents their thought; otherwise their subjects will respect neither law nor lawgivers. Thus gradually the gods become entangled in a network of statutes made by themselves, which they must obey in order to maintain their authority.

No wonder Wotan, who represents the Will, ultimately begins to long for the advent of a higher power—the ideal man—to extricate the gods from their position! But not till the middle of "The Ring" does the highest order of all appear—the order of hero—in the person of Siegfried, who makes an end of dwarfs, giants, and gods; destroys the artificial rule of law, and inaugurates a new reign of freedom of thought. Such, in briefest outline, is the message of "The Ring." But, in truth, if one may put it frankly, very few musicians give any thought to the message nowadays. Wagner was no doubt very serious about it, but the amateur can enjoy the great work without knowing anything whatever of that philosophical basis which it takes Mr. Bernard Shaw one hundred and forty pages to explain.

Similarly with the music, the details of which could not be exhausted in a portly octavo. "The Ring" is one vast web of "motives," many of which rivet themselves at once upon the listener's attention. It must not, however, be supposed (the mistake is often made) that the scores are compounded of "a string of disconnected phrases, arbitrarily formed and capriciously titled." The scores are symphonic in their scope. That is to say, the "motives" are welded together and worked up in such a way as to produce the effect of a united whole, rich in variety, beauty, and meaning—a glittering texture of harmony and counterpoint, of which the pianoforte score can give but a faint conception. If the listener can pick out the various "motives" as the drama proceeds, it will add immeasurably to his intellectual and artistic pleasure. But Wagner's music, as I have before insisted, makes the right mood-pictures even for him who does not know the guiding themes, and this is one of the best proofs of the composer's greatness.

To enjoy these dramas, in fact, only a perfect understanding of the text is necessary. To quote one of the master's biographers, "If you know what the characters are saying and doing, the music will do its own work. It will create the right mood for you, though you do not know the name of a single leading theme." This, surely, is a comforting thought for the average opera-goer who has been

led by the makers of many books on the Wagnerian drama to believe that only when he has analysed the Wagner score to its last bar can he fully enjoy the music in actual performance.

The literature of "The Ring" is already on the way to become as extensive as the literature of "Hamlet." Readers who desire to study the subject in fuller detail than can here be attempted—whether from the literary, the ethical, or the musical sides—must refer to larger works such as Mr. W. J. Henderson's "Richard Wagner: His Life and his Dramas," to which volume, as well as to the "Musical Studies" of Dr. Hueffer, I am much indebted. Purely musical students will find the analysis of Mr. S. H. Hamer (Cassell) of peculiar value.

THE RHINEGOLD

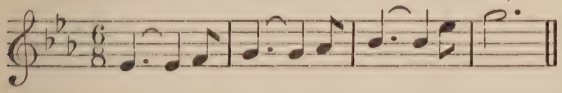
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WOTAN, *the Chief of the Gods*
FRICKA, *his Wife*
ALBERICH, *Chief of the Nibelungs or Gnomes*
MIME, *his Brother*
LOGE, *the Fire-god*
FROH, *the God of Youth*
DONNER, *the God of Strength*
FREIA, *the Goddess of Love and Beauty*
FASOLT } *Giants*
FAFNER }
ERDA, *the All-Wise Mother Earth*
WOGLINDE }
WELLGUNDE } *Rhine-Maidens*
FLOSSHILDE }

THE RHINEGOLD

It is of essential importance to understand clearly the story of "The Rhinegold," since it forms the basis, the motive of the entire cycle of "The Ring." I shall therefore outline it in some detail.

There is little to say about the musical introduction. It is founded on the chord of E flat, given out at first in long-drawn notes, which soon dissolve into shorter rhythmical formations, rising and falling alternately from the lowest to the highest octaves, like the murmuring waves of a rapid river. It introduces the first guiding theme of the drama, the motive of the primeval elements, which plays an important part throughout:



This gentle, melodious phrase is gradually developed until the curtain rises.

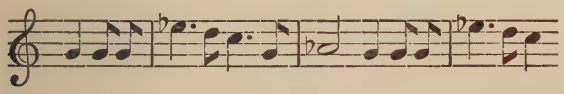
Then we see the bed of the Rhine, amongst the rocks and cliffs of which the three Rhine-maidens, Woglinde, Wellgunde, and Flosshilde, guardians of the Rhinegold, are swimming to and fro, singing

their cabalistic songs as they disport themselves around the particular rock on which is deposited the mysterious treasure; accompanied always by the gentle, wavy notes of the orchestra. Their undulating gambols are soon interrupted by the appearance of Alberich, the prince of the Nibelungs (strange dwarf people who dwell in the bowels of the earth), a mischievous gnome, who, ascending from the dark regions of his nebulous kingdom, is filled with amorous longing for the lovely naiads of the Rhine. A playful scene ensues. Alberich clumsily tries to catch first one and then another of the nymphs. Sport and mockery are his only reward. Despair and rage follow as he continues to be tricked by the gracefully elusive maidens. The musical accompaniment to this scene is of extreme delicacy, of almost cloying sweetness; notably the mock tenderness of the girls finds an expression, the sly humour of which little forebodes the grave, tragical accents soon to follow.

Suddenly, at a burst of the rising sun, the Rhinegold is seen to glow with a golden light, brightening the sombre green of the waves as with a tinge of fire. As the gold discloses itself, we hear this theme, given out in stirring tones by the orchestra—

Alherich and the Rhine-maidens

The Undines greet the appearing gold with shouts of joyful acclamation, gleefully singing as they circle round the rock. Alberich is stunned by the splendour of the golden illumination. He demands to know what it means. Incautiously the maidens inform him that he who gains this glittering hoard, should he weld it into a ring, will become lord of the wide world. There is, however, an important condition (and this is one of Wagner's most poetic and original touches)—no one can wield the power of the possession unless he renounces for ever the delights of love, cursing and abjuring all the joys of that master passion. Here the listener should note the striking Renunciation of Love theme, which constantly recurs in the course of the tragedy; not necessarily always in connection with the ring, but always in connection with Renunciation in one form or another—

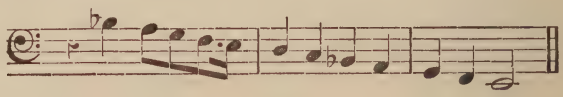


&c.

It is, the girls teasingly add, a hopeless case for the love-sick dwarf. But Alberich sees it otherwise. He has failed in his attempt to win one of the Undines. Now he is smitten with the lust for boundless power; and in a fit of frenzy, uttering the awful cry, "Love I forswear for ever," he climbs the rock, tears away the shining treasure, and vanishes

amid a scene of the wildest confusion. Night closes in; darkness envelops the stage; the wailing of the dismayed Rhine-maidens, mourning for their guardian gold, is alone heard in the gloom.

From the depths of the Rhine we are now transferred to a high ridge of mountains, at the foot of which is a grassy plateau. Walhalla, the destined abode of the gods, is seen in the distance, its stately pinnacles piercing the sky. In the foreground Wotan, the supreme god of Northern mythology, lies asleep in the flowery meadow, his wife Fricka, the Teutonic equivalent of Juno, by his side. A solemn melody, expressive of divine splendour and dignity, is here emitted from the orchestra. Wotan speaks in his dream, telling of the palace built for him by the giants, Fafner and Fasolt, as at once the symbol and safeguard of his power. Fricka wakes him from his fond delusions. She reminds him of the price to be paid—of how he had agreed with the giants to give them, as a reward for the building of Walhalla, her sister Freia, the goddess of youth and love and beauty. It is now that we hear the following emphatic descending figure, motive of the treaty; a figure reiterated again and again whenever Wotan's freedom of action is hampered—



Fricka proceeds to explain how she had "urged the building of Walhalla in the hope that it might allure Wotan to rest, and reproaches him with having sacrificed to the desire of might and power the worth of womanly love." Freia herself now enters, pursued by Fasolt and Fafner, who come to demand their pay.

Wotan tells them they cannot have Freia; the giants remonstrate, insisting on the bond. A long and warm discussion ensues. The giants advance menacingly towards Freia; two other mighty gods, Donner and Froh, brothers of Freia, come hastily to her assistance. The giants are prepared to fight for their rights, but the entrance of Loge, the fire-god, effects a diversion. Loge tells how he has searched in vain for a ransom for Freia. Nothing has he discovered in the whole universe, he says, to rival in a man's mind woman's "worth and wonder." He goes on to tell how only one man had forsworn love, that same Alberich who stole the treasure-trove, the Rhinegold, from the Rhine-daughters. Then he explains the uses to which the gold (meanwhile fashioned into a ring by Alberich) may be put. Froh suggests the rape of the ring from Alberich. Only this ring, Loge adds, can compensate the heart for the loss of love's pleasures.

Gods and goddesses listen eagerly to his description. The potent power of the gold and its splendour moves their innermost desire; even the

giants cannot resist its temptation. For this gold, they declare, they will forego their lovely prey. But Wotan's pride revolts at the idea of his becoming the tool of the giants in depriving Alberich of his spoil. He declines to give up Freia; whereupon the giants carry off Freia, dragging their way over stock and stone down to the valley of the Rhine.

Here the scene changes: a pale mist obscures the stage, giving an old and worn aspect to the gods. Loge tauntingly reminds the gods that they have not that day tasted the apples of Freia's garden—the magic fruits of the goddess of youth, which alone secure the gods from the influence of time. This animates Wotan with a sudden resolution. To preserve his eternal youth, he will waive his dignity. Wotan and Loge then set out for Alberich's kingdom, determined to possess themselves of the ring by force or subterfuge.

Here, as Dr. Hueffer observes, we touch upon one of the keynotes of the whole drama. The gods, by their desire of splendour, have incurred a debt to their enemies the giants; to pay this, they are now intent on "theft from the thief," their object being, not to return the spoil to the lawful owners, as becomes their office, but to buy back their forfeited youth. In this act of wilful selfishness lies the germ of their doom.

The next scene is marked by broad touches

of primitive coarseness. The prelude, with its pronounced rhythmical accents, and its noise of hammers and anvils behind the scenes, indicates that we are nearing Nibelheim, the country of Alberich, the home of the Nibelungs. The vapour thickens and fills the stage. A subterranean cavern is dimly discerned, from one of the passages of which Alberich emerges, dragging with him his shrieking brother, Mime. Mime, the cleverest smith of them all, has been endeavouring to conceal, for his own benefit, a magic cap wrought of the Rhinegold, and known as the Tarnhelm. The Tarnhelm may be regarded as the Northern equivalent of Perseus' helmet. It renders its wearer invisible, and enables him to assume any form he pleases, as well as to travel to any distance in a moment of time. Cruel flagellations, alternating with the howls of the victims, are here most realistically depicted by the music; the grotesqueness of the whole scene being in exquisite contrast with the passionate but aristocratic bearing of the upper gods.

Loge and Wotan descend from above to find Mime groaning on the floor of the cavern, bemoaning his fate. They question him, and are told how Alberich, by the power of the ring, compels the Nibelungs to do his bidding, and has thus forced him to make the Tarnhelm. Alberich now reappears, urging before him a crowd of Nibe-

lungs laden with gold and silver, which they pile in a heap under his directions. Loge acts on Alberich's vanity by throwing out doubts as to the boasted virtues of the Tarnhelm. Taken thus unawares, Alberich first changes himself into a monstrous snake and then into a toad. "Catch it, quick!" says Loge to Wotan, who thereupon sets his foot on the toad, while at the same time Loge snatches the vaunted cap from its head. Alberich, now struggling in his own form, is bound securely by the gods, who, carrying him off to the upper world, demand that he shall order the Nibelungs to bring the treasure from their subterranean regions.

At last (and here we are in the fourth scene) he is compelled to renounce the ring, by means of which he had hoped to rule the world. Before parting with it he pronounces his ban on the ring, vowing that it shall bring disaster and death upon every one who wears it until it returns to its original possessors. "As through curse to me it came, accursed be this ring!" The mist in the foreground now gradually disperses; and the giants, with Freia, appear to claim their reward. Fasolt asks for gold sufficient to cover their prisoner (Freia) from head to foot. Loge and Froh thereupon begin to pile up the treasure so as to hide the precious goddess from sight. The treasure is exhausted, yet a chink remains through which the

fair Freia remains visible to her oppressors. Fasolt, discerning the gleam of Freia's eye, insists on a full equivalent for renouncing the goddess. Fafner demands the ring, which Wotan refuses. The giants wrathfully threaten to break the bargain and are on the point of bearing off Freia a second time when the stage grows dark, and from a rocky cleft rises up Erda, pantheistic symbol of Earth, the mother of the Fates. In solemn words she warns Wotan to give up the ring. Wotan obeys, throwing the bauble on the golden heap, which the giants at once proceed to collect in a huge sack.

But no sooner have they touched the ring than its curse begins to operate. Fafner and Fasolt both claim exclusive possession of the ring. They quarrel over it, and in the broil Fafner kills Fasolt. The gods stand by in dumb amazement, realising now the import of Erda's warning. Fafner meanwhile makes off with the treasure, thus fulfilling the curse. Fricka signs to Wotan to enter Walhalla, and Wotan consents. Next, Donner (the god of thunder) and Froh proceed to clear the air of mists and clouds, Donner mounting a rocky eminence and swinging his hammer. Wotan hails Walhalla with delight, and as he leads the gods and goddesses towards the bridge, the cry of the Rhine-daughters is heard from below. Loge informs the maidens that the gold will not be restored to them; and, as the curtain falls,

the gods enter Walhalla by a rainbow which Froh has thrown across the valley of the Rhine, while below is still heard the eerie dirge of the Rhine-daughters, lamenting their lost treasure.

Such is the story of "The Rhinegold," remarkable among the later works of its composer for brevity and concentration. It lacks in human interest, but, on the other hand, as Mr. Streatfeild has remarked, its supernatural machinery is complete. The denizens of the world are grouped in four divisions—gods in heaven, giants on earth, dwarfs beneath, water-sprites in the Rhine. The work has a freshness and an open-air feeling eminently suitable to the prologue of a trilogy which deals so much with the vast forces of Nature. Musically, it hardly ranks with its successors; but some of its tonal pictures—the lovely opening scene and the grand closing march to Walhalla, for instance—it would be difficult to match throughout the glowing gallery of "The Ring."

THE VALKYRIE

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIEGMUND, *the Walsung*
SIEGLINDE, *his Sister*
HUNDING, *Husband of Sieglinde*
WOTAN
FRICKA
BRÜNNHILDE
GERHILDE
ORTLINDE
WALTRAUTE
SVERTLEITE
HELMWIGE
SIGRUNE
GRIMGREDE
ROSSWEISE
} *The Valkyries, Daughters of Wotan*

THE VALKYRIE

Before the opening of "The Valkyrie" many events have taken place. Wotan has begotten the nine Valkyries (literally choosers of the slain), whose mission it is to bring to Walhalla the souls of the heroes who have fallen in battle. Moreover, to escape the evil influence of Alberich's curse, Wotan has descended to earth, and, under the name of Volse, has begotten the Volsung twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde. These he leaves to be trained in the school of adversity, hoping that Siegmund will kill Fafner and restore the gold to the Rhine-maidens.

The orchestral introduction is of a turbulent and stormy character, the incessant triplets of the violins being "suggestive of hail and rain beating on the leaves of tall trees, while the rolling figure in the bass seems to indicate the angry voice of thunder." The storm subsides and the curtain rises, disclosing the interior of Hunding's roughly-built timber dwelling. From the centre of the empty room rises the trunk of a great tree, type of the world's ash, Yggdrasil. A fire is burning. Siegmund enters, and drops down by the hearth, weaponless and half dead with fatigue. Sieglinde emerges from an inner

chamber to gaze in astonishment at the stranger. Noting his exhausted condition, she refreshes him with food and drink, both looking the while into each other's eyes with an interest not yet conscious of the kinship between them. Music of extraordinary beauty and pathos portrays their powerful mutual attraction.

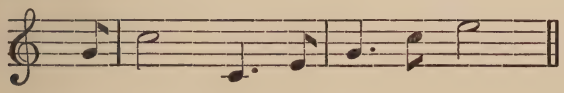
Siegmund asks to know where he is, and is informed in reply that house and wife belong to Hunding, whose arrival is soon after announced by the sound of his horse's hoof. Sieglinde hastily opens the door. Hunding enters, pausing on the threshold as he notes the presence of the stranger: noting also, presently, the likeness between Siegmund and Sieglinde, especially the "glittering serpent" in the eyes of each. Sieglinde tells of the coming of Siegmund; and Hunding gives the guest a grudging welcome. Sieglinde proceeds to prepare a meal, while Siegmund, at Hunding's invitation, recounts his adventures.

Beginning with his early life, he narrates how, "coming home from the forest, his father and he found their home destroyed by enemies, the mother killed, the sister carried off; how, after that, they lived the lives of outlaws, at war with the world, till at last his father was taken from him. Separated from his father in battle, Siegmund had followed his trace everywhere, but at last, finding an empty wolf-skin, his father's dress, concluded him to be slain."

His last fight, Siegmund continues, has been to protect a maiden from her brothers, who were determined to wed her to an unloved man. He slew the brothers, but the vassals of the dead men crowded on Siegmund; the maid died; and Siegmund was compelled to fly and seek rest for the night in Hunding's hut.

Such, in brief, was Siegmund's story. "For one night," his host makes answer, "my house shall be thy refuge, but to-morrow, see to thy weapon, for thou shalt pay with thy life for the dead." For Hunding himself, be it observed, is one of the tribe with whom Siegmund had fought that day.

Left alone by the dying firelight, Siegmund broods over his impending doom. He reflects sadly how fate has delivered him, with no means of defence, into the hands of his bitterest enemy. Suddenly there is a stirring of the embers, and from the sparks a sharp light is thrown on a particular part of the ash tree, to which Sieglinde when leaving the room had furtively but vainly directed Siegmund's attention. There Siegmund now makes out the hilt of a sword—the very weapon which his father had promised him in his highest need—while the trumpets give out the Sword theme with almost startling effect—

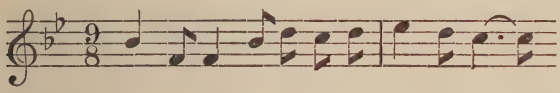


The fire dies down completely; darkness reigns. The door opens softly, and Sieglinde reappears. Her husband, she says, lies in deepest sleep, for she has mingled a drug with his night-drink. She has come to urge Siegmund to flight, and to point out to him the weapon close at his hand, the sword in the ash tree. The description of her wedding to Hunding, to whom she has been sold against her will, and the account she gives of the mysterious sword are almost a literal counterpart of the old tale in the Volsunga Saga, which it may therefore be interesting to quote:

The tale tells that great fires were made endlong the hall, and the great tree aforesaid stood midmost thereof; withal folk say, that whereas men sat by the fires in the evening, a certain man came into the hall unknown of all men; and such like array he had, that over him was a spotted cloak, and he was barefoot, and had linen breeches knit tight even unto the bone, and he had a sword in his hand as he went up to the Brandstock, and a slouched hat upon his head: huge he was, and seeming-ancient and one-eyed. So he drew his sword and smote it into the tree-trunk, so that it sank in up to the hilt; and all held back from greeting the man. Then he took up the word and said: Whoso draweth this sword from this stock, shall have the same as a gift from me, and shall find in good sooth that never bare he better sword in hand than is this. Therewith out went the old man from the hall, and none knew who he was or whither he went. Now men stand up, and none would fain be the last to lay hand to the sword, for they deemed that he would have the best of it who might first touch it; so all the noblest went thereto first, and then

the others one after other; but none who came thereto might avail to pull it out, for in nowise would it come away, howsoever they tugged at it.

In a word, many had tried in vain: the sword still remained fast in the tree. Tender emotions follow these warlike thoughts. Siegmund draws Sieglinde to his breast, and in a song of spring and love, sweeter perhaps than ever music and poetry combined to bring forth, declares that they are destined for each other—



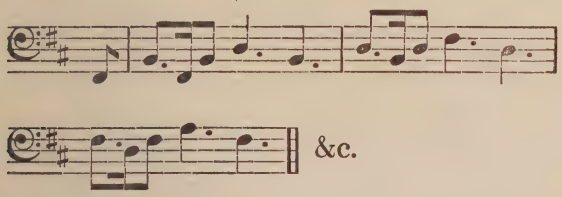
&c.

It is a marvellous love-scene altogether. Sieglinde has been struck from the first with the stranger's resemblance to herself, and now she asks for his real name. The disclosure is made: Siegmund is no Wolfing but a Volsung, and Sieglinde hails him by that name. "This sword," she says, as she proclaims herself his sister, "has been destined for thee by our father Volsung." With a mighty wrench, and with the exultant cry, "Nothung! Nothung! name I this sword!" Siegmund tears the weapon from the tree, and Sieglinde throws herself on his breast in a transport of desire. The avowal of their relationship cannot quench the passion of the unfortunate pair, and the curtain drops over the subsequent scene.

This episode, this illicit love of brother and sister, used to be, and still sometimes is, objected to as a shock to modern feelings. It is, however, as a critic pointed out so long ago as 1876, a vital ingredient of Wagner's story, and has been treated by him in the open and therefore chaste spirit of the old myth itself. It must be remembered that we are not dealing here with ordinary men and women, but with the children of a god—mythical beings, that is, who have hardly yet emerged from the state of natural forces. Who has ever been shocked at the amours of the Greek divinities on account of their being within the forbidden degrees of relationship, or even at the intermarriages of the children of Adam and Eve, which the Pentateuch implies? The tragic guilt for which Sieglinde suffers does not lie in her love for her brother, but in the breach of her marriage vow. The punishment of this guilt is now rapidly approaching.

When the curtain rises on the Second Act it is to expose a wild and rocky pass. Wotan is instructing Brünnhilde, his favourite Valkyrie daughter, to assist Siegmund in the impending combat with Hunding. Here the discerning musical listener will note a couple of motives specially associated with Brünnhilde in her character of Valkyrie. One is the Valkyrie's call, frequently repeated; the other, used afterwards whenever the nature of the Valkyrie has to be emphasised, seems to be designed

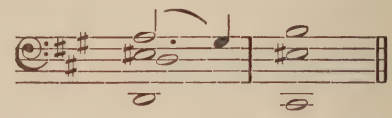
rhythmically to suggest the motion of the Valkyrie steed—



Suddenly Fricka's chariot, drawn by two rams, is seen approaching, and Brünnhilde disappears, with her wild Valkyrie cry. Fricka has come to demand vengeance for Siegmund's unlawful act in carrying off Sieglinde. She complains of the injury done to her, the protectress of marriage, by Siegmund and his sister. She insists that Wotan shall punish his children. Wotan pleads the power of love in their favour; reminding Fricka that Sieglinde had accepted a husband against her own inclinations. Fricka refuses to listen. She charges Wotan with unfaithfulness to her. It was he, she asserts, who, as Volsung, "roamed the woods and became the father of Siegmund and Sieglinde, and bids him finish his work and trample on her in triumph." The sinful Siegmund, she reiterates, must die. Brünnhilde's voice is heard from the heights, and on her appearance, Fricka extracts from Wotan an oath that Siegmund shall fall.

Wotan then confides his hopes to Brünnhilde, but enjoins her to obey Fricka's mandate; and they,

too, depart. Siegmund and Sieglinde enter, and the wearied woman falls swooning in her brother's arms. Now for the first time we hear the solemn, mysterious Fate-motive, often used later—



Brünnhilde reappears, and in an enchanting scene announces to Siegmund his approaching end, telling him at the same time that the joys of Walhalla await him. Siegmund passionately protests that he will not die or go to Walhalla without his bride; and Brünnhilde, moved by his entreaties, by his bravery and the ardour of his love for Sieglinde, promises to aid him in the fight, in accordance with Wotan's secret wish. This she does when the combatants have met on a lofty rock, but Wotan thrusts his spear between them, so that Siegmund's sword is shattered upon it. Siegmund is slain by Hunding, who is himself then stricken to death by a contemptuous wave of Wotan's hand. With the exit of Wotan, vowing vengeance on Brünnhilde, the Act ends.

The prelude to the Third Act is the familiar Ride of the Valkyries, so often heard in the concert-room—

&c.

The curtain rises on another wild scene—on the Valkyries' rock, where four of the Valkyries are assembled after their celestial ride. Again there is storm and tempest. One after another the rest of the Valkyries arrive, each preceded by a flash of lightning. Last of all comes Brünnhilde, carrying the terrified, half-unconscious Sieglinde, with whom she fled from Wotan after the scene at the end of the previous Act. Brünnhilde hands Sieglinde the splintered fragments of Siegmund's sword; foretells the birth of a son, "the highest hero of worlds," to be named Siegfried; and sends Sieglinde to hide herself in the forest to the eastward, where Fafner, the dragon, lies brooding on the hoard, guarding Alberich's ring. Wotan arrives in hot pursuit of his erring daughter; dismisses her frightened, pleading sisters; and proceeds to tell her what her punishment shall be. She shall be condemned to lie in a magic sleep on the mountain top, and be the bride of the first man who finds and wakens her. This is a scene of exquisite pathos and striking beauty, one of the gems in the colossal drama.

Brünnhilde pleads with her wrathful sire for mitigation of the cruel sentence. Wotan angrily interrupts her, bidding her prepare for her punishment. In despair, she urges that at least she may be guarded, so that none but a hero of valour and determination shall win her. Hesitatingly Wotan yields to her frenzied entreaties. Kissing her fondly

to sleep, he summons Loge, the fire-god. Flickering flames immediately burst out, so that Brünnhilde is surrounded with a rampart of fire, through which none but the bravest can pass. Wotan moves away slowly, and the curtain falls. The leave-taking of the Valkyrie and the breaking forth of the flames are illustrated musically by "one of those marvellous effects of graphically decorative writing which prove Wagner's vocation as a dramatic composer quite as clearly as the higher strains of his tender or passionate imaginings."

Many writers have remarked on the splendour of the character of Brünnhilde. One notes in her the strange commingling of godhood and womanhood. Her sympathy with the doomed pair is, says this acute critic, wholly womanly, and it leads to her becoming entirely a woman when Wotan, in enforcement of the demands of law, kisses the godhead from her. She is a creation as distinct as Shakespeare's Juliet, as great as Hamlet. In all dramatic literature there is no more majestic female figure than the Brünnhilde of "The Valkyrie" and "Siegfried." In the final drama she diminishes in stature, by reason of the loss of her virginity. Then she is only a weak woman, except in the last scene, when she rises once more on the wings of grief to the proudest heights of self-sacrifice.

"The Valkyrie" is, justly, the most generally popular of the four works which constitute "The

Wotan summons Loge to guard Brünnhilde

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Ring." The plot is simple and touching, with something of real human interest which readily appeals to the feelings of the listener. Musically, too, the work is generally attractive. There is always a great web of sound being woven, with certain specially brilliant patterns coming to the surface to catch the attention before it has had time to wander. While there are no set "numbers," there are sections that make a similar appeal—the opening storm, the famous "Ride," the slumber music, and the fire music. On the stage, too, there are striking pictures with effective surprises, as when the door of Hunding's hut falls open and reveals the forest bathed in moonlight, or when Wotan appears in lightning and storm to interrupt the fight between Siegmund and Hunding, or when the flames shoot up around the sleeping Brünnhilde. "The Valkyrie," like "Siegfried," has colour and variety enough for the amateur who does not care about following the composer's "guiding themes," and is not at all interested in the underlying philosophic significance of the story.

SIEGFRIED

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIEGFRIED
MIME } *Nibelungs*
ALBERICH }
WOTAN, *the Wanderer*
FAFNER, *the Dragon*
ERDA
BRÜNNHILDE

SIEGFRIED

After his parting from Brünnhilde, Wotan truly is nothing but a departed spirit; his highest aim can only be to let things *take their course,* go their own gait, no longer definitely to interfere; for that reason, too, has he become the "Wanderer." Take a good look at him! He resembles *us* to a hair; he is the sum of the Intellect of the Present, whilst Siegfried is the Man of the Future, the man we wish, the man we will, but cannot make, and the man who must create himself through *our* annihilation.—RICHARD WAGNER, *Letter to August Roeckel,* 1854.

"SIEGFRIED," the third drama in the tetralogy, was the second in order of conception. In it Wagner "was chiefly attracted by the charm of a character developed in immediate contact with Nature; being, indeed, one with Nature, and therefore, like Nature, fresh and ever new in its impulsive *naïveté.*" This character is Siegfried, the hero of the two last dramas of the cycle.

A certain period of time is supposed to have elapsed since the curtain descended on the tragic close of the previous drama. Sieglinde had found refuge with the dwarf Mime, who was in the forest watching Fafner and his ill-gotten treasure. She died in giving birth to Siegfried, and Mime brought

him up, hoping that when he grew to manhood he, with the welded fragments of Siegmund's sword, would slay the dragon (Fafner) and win for him the Nibelung hoard. When the curtain rises Mime is discovered in his forest hut, trying to forge a sword for Siegfried; complaining all the time that the ungrateful youth always dashes the weapons which he makes to pieces on the anvil, as though they were the merest toys. Presently the impulsive, eager, discontented Siegfried enters, only to repeat his old performance with the newly-forged weapon.

He questions the cunning dwarf as to his birth, as to the import of certain strange emotions in his breast. Mime tells him the story of his origin, and produces as evidence the pieces of the broken sword. These fragments Mime shall reunite, declares Siegfried, as he rushes out again to the forest. But Mime is unequal to the task: to forge the weapon anew defies all the dwarf's efforts. At this point Wotan arrives on the scene, disguised as a wanderer, and in an exchange of riddles with Mime, during which Mime forfeits his head, tells him that only one who "never knew fear" shall accomplish the task. Wotan departs, and Siegfried again enters, this time to weld the broken blade once more into a sword, thus triumphing over the frightened dwarf. With one mighty stroke of the new weapon, Siegfried cleaves the anvil in twain. The whole of this scene of the welding of the sword is "sung in music

Siegfried slays the dragon

aglow with the flame of the forge, alive with the rhythm of the bellows and the hammer."

The Second Act takes place in the depths of the forest, whither Mime has brought Siegfried to slay the dragon, Fafner. Alberich, to quote Mr. Henderson's summary of this part of the drama, lies in watch outside Fafner's cave, and Wotan comes to warn the dragon that his fate draws near. Alberich listens, wondering, while Wotan addresses the dragon in his lair. Anon, Mime conducts Siegfried to the spot and leaves him. Alone the hero muses on his life, his birth, his mother's death, his own lack of a mate. He hears the song of a forest bird, and thinks, could he but understand the songster, it might tell him of his needs. He fashions a reed pipe wherewith to talk to the bird, but his effort is futile. The scene is one of strange beauty, the orchestra imitating the weaving of the forest leaves and shadows in a wondrous tone-poem. Despairing of success with the reed, Siegfried winds a blast upon his horn, and Fafner emerges from his concealment.

Siegfried slays the dragon; and plucking his sword from the monster's heart, he wets his finger with the blood, and cleanses it with his tongue. At once he understands the songs of the birds, who tell him of the ring and of the Tarnhelm, and warn him that Mime is treacherous. Mime's aim is to poison Siegfried and secure the treasure for himself alone. In sudden disgust, Siegfried kills the dwarf, and

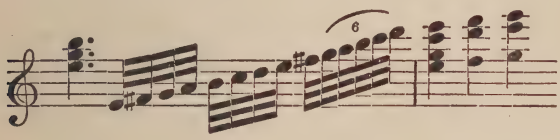
throws his corpse into the dragon's cave. Once more the birds sing to Siegfried, telling him that Brünnhilde lies asleep, guarded by flame, on the mountain top, where only the dauntless hero can approach her. Siegfried leaps forward on the path, a bird pointing him the way, and the Act comes to an end.

The Third Act, which represents a rugged landscape at the foot of Brünnhilde's rock, introduces us again, and for the last time, to Wotan. The god has grown old. He knows that his end, "the dusk of the gods," is approaching, and willingly he signifies his intention of resigning the earth and its joys to youth, of handing over his kingdom to the new race. In this voluntary act of resignation lies the expiation of Wotan. Yet when he meets Siegfried on his way to Brünnhilde's rock, he threateningly holds up his spear to bar the passage of the young hero. Impatient of delay, Siegfried treats the unknown's advice with scorn, and cuts the opposing spear in pieces. The runes incised on its haft have lost their power; the old order of the world is broken, and Wotan disappears for ever from the scene, to prepare for his final doom. We hear of him, but see him no more till the flames of Walhalla reveal him in the blazing sky.

The tragedy of "The Ring," it may be said in passing, is the tragedy of Wotan. Yet Wotan is by many regarded as the bore of the piece; and certainly there are times when it requires all the charm of the

music to make his prosings tolerable. But this is a digression.

To resume: gaily singing, Siegfried pierces the protecting flame, the fiery ring, and wakens Brünnhilde, the sleeping beauty. He "cuts the byrny from her bosom and wakes her with a kiss!" Wonderful is the music of the awakening—



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Brünnhilde sings her hymn to sunlight and earth, and proclaims herself Siegfried's from the beginning. One last struggle for her maidenhood, and she yields herself. The union is made, the old order is done; the new race is to come and rule the world. The drama closes with a duet of exquisite loveliness, and we are ready for "The Dusk of the Gods," the last of the great cycle of "The Ring."

"Siegfried" was Wagner's own favourite: "the most beautiful of my life's dreams," he called it. Readily may we agree with him. "Siegfried," as has been happily observed, is the Scherzo of the great Nibelungen Symphony. Its jubilant, outdoor life, the buoyant, fearless, militant innocence of the hero, make a refreshing change from the tragedy and gloom of "The Valkyrie." The vigour and sweetness of spring and of young manhood per-

meate it throughout. If it has less incident than "The Valkyrie," it has more sustained power. The music, the great bulk of which is freely composed and unfettered by the employment of guiding themes, is everywhere instinct with resource and beauty. In power, picturesqueness, and command of orchestral colour and device, Wagner never surpassed such scenes as the opening of the Third Act, or Siegfried's scaling of Brünnhilde's rock. The Third Act has been described as one long, impassioned love-duet, and such in truth it is, affording unique scope for dramatic vocalists. With most listeners, however, the jewel of the work is the wood music in the Second Act, in which "the murmuring sounds of the forest, with its calling of birds and rustling of leaves, are reproduced in delicate orchestral phrases that are interwoven to form a musical picture of the richest colouring."

THE DUSK OF THE GODS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIEGFRIED
GUNTHER, *the Gibichung*
GUTRUNE, *his Sister*
HAGEN, *Half-brother to Gunther and Son of Alberich*
ALBERICH
BRÜNNHILDE
The Three Norns
The Rhine-Maidens
WALTRAUTE

Chorus of Vassals and Women

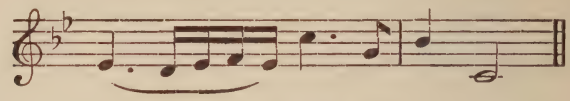
THE DUSK OF THE GODS

THIS, the last drama of the cycle, opens with a prologue on the summit of Brünnhilde's rock. It is night, with the yellow glow of the fire in the background. The three Norns, goddesses of Fate, born of Erda "before the world was," are discovered spinning the web of destiny; peering into the past, the present, and the future. The scene, as has often been remarked, has no close dramatic relation to the drama about to be enacted; but is rather "a pictorial and musical mood tableau, designed to fill the mind of the auditor with portents." While the Norns are endeavouring to fathom the outcome of the curse on the ring, the cord which they have been spinning suddenly snaps. The Norns pick up the broken pieces of thread, and with frightened cries disappear into the earth.

Now the day dawns, and Siegfried and Brünnhilde come forth from their cavern-home—he in full armour (*hers*, by the way), she leading her horse, Grane. Here two new motives indicating the altered characters of the pair are heard—those

of Brünnhilde, the woman, and Siegfried, the mature hero:

Brünnhilde, the Woman



Siegfried, the Man

The first of these, to quote Mr. Henderson again, expresses very beautifully the loving, clinging nature of the Valkyrie. The second is a thematic development of the motive of Siegfried, the youth. The change is chiefly one of rhythm. Siegfried, the youth, is depicted musically in six-eight measure, a rhythm buoyant and piquant. For Siegfried, the mature hero, the melodic sequence is preserved, but the rhythm is changed to a dual one. The change is one founded on the nature of music, for the dual rhythm is firm, square, and solid. The injection of minor harmony at the end is heard in the first announcement of this theme, and serves to indicate approaching sorrow. This motive rises to its grandest development in the funeral march after Siegfried's death, when the orchestra passes in review, in a composition of wonderful beauty and power, the themes most closely associated with him. But we are anticipating.

Brünnhilde and Siegfried are before us. She is sending him forth to new exploits of valour; fearing, however, that, having given him all, she may not be able to hold his heart in absence.

My wisdom fails,
But good-will remains;
So full of love
But failing in strength,
Thou wilt despise
Perchance the poor one,
Who, having giv'n all,
Can grant thee no more.

Siegfried assures her of his lasting affection, and, as a pledge of his fidelity, he gives her the ring, adding the story of his winning it from the dragon, and bidding her preserve it as a wedding charm. Brünnhilde rapturously accepts the fateful gift, and in return makes over to Siegfried her horse Grane, who has, with herself, lost all his necromantic powers. His reply reveals how much he owes to her: "Thy noble steed bestriding, and with thy sheltering shield, now am I Siegfried no more: I am but Brünnhilde's arm." Siegfried now sets out in search of adventure, and the scene changes as the sounds of his horn gradually die away in the distance, echoing down the Rhine valley.

After an orchestral interlude depicting the journey of the hero, the First Act opens in the hall of the Gibichungs near the Rhine. Here Siegfried finds

Gunther, the son of Gibich, seated at a table with his sister Gutrune, and his half-brother Hagen. Hagen is the son of the Nibelung Alberich—"the anger-begotten son of Love's dark enemy"—and the object of his sojourn among men is to regain for his father possession of the ring. Accordingly, he is plotting for the downfall of Siegfried, with Gunther and Gutrune as abettors. In pursuance of his design, he brews Siegfried a magic potion, by virtue of which Siegfried forgets his troth plighted to Brünnhilde, and becomes deeply enamoured of the maidenly charms of Gutrune. Hagen suggests that in exchange for Gutrune, Siegfried shall bring Brünnhilde to be Gunther's bride; and Siegfried, assuming Gunther's form by the power of his Tarnhelm cap, returns to Brünnhilde's rock, and compels her by the force of his arm to share his couch. After snatching the ring from her finger, he leads her off to his new friend.

"Why does Brünnhilde so speedily submit to the disguised Siegfried?" asks Wagner himself. "Just because he had torn from her the ring, in which alone she treasured up her strength. The terror, the demoniacal character of the whole scene must be noted. Through the flames fore-doomed for Siegfried alone to pass, the fire which experience has shown that he alone *could* pass, there strides to her, with small ado—another. The ground reels beneath Brünnhilde's feet, the world is out of joint;

in a terrible struggle she is overpowered, she is 'forsaken by God.' Moreover, it is Siegfried, in reality, whom (unconsciously, but all the more bewilderingly) despite his mask, she—almost—recognises by his flashing eye."

Once more, in the Second Act, we return to the banks of the Rhine, to the castle of Gunther, whither Brünnhilde has been dragged. It begins with the appearance of Alberich, who is inciting Hagen to further efforts towards regaining the ring. On Brünnhilde's arrival, she is met by Siegfried in his own form; and, perceiving the ring on his finger, she inquires of him how he comes to be wearing the circlet which Gunther had so lately wrenched from *her* finger. "Ha!" she exclaims. "That ring upon his hand! His—? Siegfried's—?" No satisfactory answer is forthcoming, and she bursts out with the charge that not Gunther but Siegfried married her. "He forced delights of love from me!" she cries. She accuses Siegfried of perjury, and although he protests his innocence, she soon convinces Gunther, and together with Hagen, they deliberate about Siegfried's destruction. Siegfried must die—that is the decision. Hagen shouts in triumph; the ring and its power will soon be his.

The Third and last Act shows the three Rhine-maidens disporting themselves in the water in a cove of the river. "Queen Sun, send us the hero who again our gold will give us!" they sing. Siegfried,

who has been hunting in the forest, and has strayed from his comrades, shows himself, in full armour, on the rocks above them. They implore him to return the ring, which he is wearing, but he keeps it in spite of their warning him of the curse attached to it. Siegfried's hunting companions appear on the scene, and, while they rest, he recounts the adventures of his past life. As the story is about to touch his first meeting with Brünnhilde, "old memories seem to rise before his mind. They grow more vivid with every new incident he relates, and the moment he mentions the name of his love, the veil is torn asunder, and the consciousness of his deed and his loss stands before his eyes."

Alas! this moment is to be his last. As he ends his tale, two ravens, the birds of Wotan, fly over his head. He turns to look at them. Hagen plunges his spear into Siegfried's back, the only vulnerable part of his body, and the hero dies apostrophising his Valkyr love. Siegfried has fallen a victim to the curse of the gold.

In the grand final scene, the body of Siegfried is borne back through the moonlit forest to the Hall of the Gibichungs, to the solemn strains of one of the most impressive of dead marches. The bleeding corpse is laid at the feet of Gutrune, the unsuspecting wife. A wild boar has killed her lord, is Hagen's explanation. When the body is brought in, Hagen reaches for the ring, but the dead hand is

Brünnhilde gives herself to the flames

raised in solemn warning, and Hagen staggers back, terrified and abashed.

At this juncture, Brünnhilde, who has been assured by the Rhine-maidens that Siegfried's acts were due to the magic potion, enters the hall, thrusting the weeping Gutrune aside. She claims for herself the sole right of a wife's grief; and, taking the ring from Siegfried's finger, she places it upon her own. A funeral pyre has been reared, on which lies the body of her beloved Siegfried. Him she will join in his fiery grave; and when she is reduced to ashes, the Rhine-maidens may once more possess themselves of the ring.

Lighting the fire herself, she mounts her horse Grane, and rushes into the flames. The waters of the Rhine rise to overflowing, invading the hall. Hagen vainly attempts to secure the ring, and is swept away by the flood, while the Rhine-maidens regain the coveted circlet. Meanwhile, the sky has become overspread by a ruddy glow: Walhalla is in flames, and with its destruction go the old gods, whose ill-gotten power yields before the might of human love. "The ancient heaven, sapped by the lust of gold, has crumbled, and a new world, founded upon self-sacrificing love, rises from its ashes to usher in the era of freedom." So ends the great music epic of "The Ring," the grandest achievement in the annals of opera.

The music "hurries the auditor along from one

incident to another, and is replete with significant motives and poetic fervour." According to M. Saint-Saëns, the eminent French composer, it trebles the intensity of the feelings with which the characters are animated. "From the elevation of the last Act," he says, "the whole work appears, in its almost supernatural grandeur, like the chain of the Alps seen from the summit of Mont Blanc." Every scene and every note has, as Mr. Elson says, its own meaning. The gloomy music of the Norns, the great duet of farewell between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, and the well-wrought Rhine journey are all thoroughly effective. So, too, is the chorus of homage to Gunther, and the many dramatic passages in the Hall of the Gibichungs. But undoubtedly the greatest single Act in all Wagner's works is the closing one of the trilogy, for here is found the delicious trio of the Rhine-maidens, the wonderful funeral march of Siegfried, and the dramatic climax of Brünnhilde's tragic fate. The final scene is one of "unequalled breadth and power," forming a worthy and majestic close to the most stupendous music-drama that has ever been staged.

PARSIFAL

THE LEGEND OF THE HOLY GRAIL

THE legend of the Holy Grail is a fascinating subject: complicated, too; demanding for its full, explicit treatment a volume to itself. Wagner's librettos all make engaging themes for the erudite, and much literature, the result of diligent delving, has followed in the wake of most of them. The Grail, as we now regard it, was the cup first used by Christ at the Last Supper, and afterwards by Joseph of Arimathea to collect the blood which flowed from the Saviour's wounds as He hung on the Cross. Tennyson's lines are familiar—

> "The Holy Grail! . . . What is it?
> The phantom of a cup that comes and goes?"
> "Nay, monk, what phantom?" answered Percivale.
> "The cup, the cup itself, from which our Lord
> Drank at the last sad supper with His own."

There is good reason for believing that the Grail was originally a Pagan talisman; but, assuming that origin, it developed in course of time into a purely Christian symbol, and the legend was then largely influenced by Christian ideas.

In the various romances connected with the story, two distinct portions are easily made out: (1) the Grail itself (the actual sacred cup); and (2) the Quest of the Grail. The Quest romances are the older. In these the Grail is a miraculous food-producing vessel; sharing its importance equally with a splintered sword which only the destined hero can make whole, and a lance which drips blood. The hero appears under the name of Perceval or Parzival (Wagner pretended to derive the name from Fal-Parsi, *i.e.* "pure fool") in most of the romances.

In his Quest he comes to the castle of the Grail, sees the holy vessel, fails to ask concerning it, is rebuked for this capital omission, has to wander many years, comes a second and a third time to the castle, welds the fragments of a broken sword or kills the enemy of the king, is hailed by the latter as his nephew, and succeeds him in his kingship or releases him from supernaturally prolonged life or from the enchantment of death in life. Such, in a word or two, is the subject-matter of the Grail romances, so far as they are connected with the Quest.

The Christianising of the legend brought about an important change in the idea of the Grail. Its properties became exclusively spiritual. It separated the pure from the impure, and gave to the pure "as full and sweet solace as their hearts

could long for." In some versions, however, the material and the spiritual properties of the Grail are equally insisted upon. Malory makes the Quest romance the foundation of his noble and famous fragment, "Morte d'Arthur," and through him the subject has had a great and permeating influence on English literature, particularly in the works of Tennyson.

There was a version of the Grail romance as early as the end of the twelfth century. But Wagner admittedly founded his text on Wolfram von Eschenbach's "Parzival" (*cir.* 1210), the completest and most beautiful, taking it as a whole, of all the forms of the legend that have survived. Mr. Henderson admirably summarises it in his book on Wagner. In the earlier part of his work, Wolfram devotes a large amount of space to the adventures of Parsifal's father, whom he names Gamuret. Gamuret is killed through treachery, and his widow tries to bring up the son, Parsifal, in utter ignorance of everything pertaining to chivalry.

Wolfram's "Parsifal" is, in fact, the simple-minded, witless character of the Wagner drama. His mother dresses him in fool's clothes, and in these he appears at Arthur's Court, demanding to be made a knight. In the course of subsequent adventures, he slays a noble, carries off the victim's armour and equipments, and reaches the chateau of

an elderly lord named Gurnemanz, from whom he receives much instruction. Setting out once more, he arrives at a besieged city, and when the citizens have won their victory (which they do partly by his aid), he marries their queen.

Restless, he is soon on the move again, seeking fresh adventures; seeking also his mother, of whose death he is ignorant. Asking one night for shelter, he is taken to a goodly castle, and is there ushered into a great hall where four hundred knights are assembled. The owner of the castle, Amfortas, motions him to a seat beside himself. A squire enters, carrying a bleeding lance. Loud wailings follow. Then a steel door opens and twenty-four entrancingly lovely maidens, splendidly attired, appear. Behind them comes "our lady and queen," Repanse de Schoie, bearing the Holy Grail, which she places on a table in front of Parsifal and Amfortas, the latter evidently suffering intense pain, physical and spiritual.

A "love-feast" is provided by the power of the Grail. Amfortas presents Parsifal with his sword. Parsifal has remained silent, asking nothing, understanding nothing. He retires to his chamber, and in the morning finds the castle apparently deserted. He mounts his horse and departs; but as he goes a squire upbraids him for not asking a question on which depended the recovery of the afflicted Amfortas and his own happiness. But

Parsifal, still confused, rides away, bent on yet further experiences. Finally he returns to the Court of Arthur, and while a banquet is in progress a sorceress named Kondrie appears.

She denounces Parsifal for neglecting to put that essential question at the castle; whereupon Parsifal abjures the Round Table, and returns to his wife, depreciating himself as unworthy, despairing of hope and mercy in the hereafter. By-and-by he meets with an aged knight and his lady, walking barefoot through the snow on a pilgrimage to the hut of a holy hermit. They censure the wanderer for not remembering that "'Tis holy Friday, when all bewail their guilt." The trio proceed together to the cell of the hermit.

The latter recounts to Parsifal the story of the Grail and the bleeding spear. Amfortas, he tells, had yielded to the temptation of lust, and as a punishment, had received in combat a wound from a poisoned lance. This wound would not heal, while the sight of the Holy Grail kept him from dying. Later a prophecy became connected with the Grail itself, to the effect that if a knight voluntarily came to ask the cause of the king's sufferings, the sufferings would cease, and the inquiring knight would himself become king. Parsifal confesses that he once went to the castle, but asked no question. The hermit then instructs him further, absolves him of his sins, and sends him on his way.

Following upon this, we read of many and varied conflicts between the Knights of the Round Table, representing Christianity, and the emissaries of the evil one. Gawain liberates the maidens imprisoned by the magician Klingsor in the Château Merveil. Gawain goes no further than that. Parsifal, being the more pious of the two, is permitted to ride to Monsalvasch, inquire the cause of the king's disorder, free him from his agony, and receive the crown. Now his wife arrives with his two sons, one of whom is Lohengrin, and destined to succeed Parsifal as the guardian of the Grail. The mediæval writer goes on to tell the story of Lohengrin and Elsa, but further we are not required to follow him.

Such were the materials upon which Wagner based the text of his mystic drama. They differ in many respects both from the earlier and later forms of the legend, and Wagner used them so far only as suited his poetic purpose. He tossed about and made sport of Wolfram and all his "authorities." Sagas, legends, poems, histories, episodes from the Saviour's life—everything and anything appropriate he boldly incorporated according to his own fancy. His "Parsifal" text has been called a "mish-mash of Gospel narrative, mediæval romance, and Teutonic philosophy." Yet Von Eschenbach was his chief model.

Comparing Wagner with that writer, there are several notable divergences between them. Eschen-

bach's conception of the Holy Grail is based, not upon chastity, but upon charity: the Grail becomes with him a symbol, not of ascetic longing and its unearthly reward, but of human striving and human love in their noblest manifestation. Here Wagner has followed Wolfram; evolving, however, as was usual with him, many new and special points of dramatic and emotional interest: improving, adding, excising, re-casting. The character of Kundry, for example, is almost entirely a Wagnerian creation. In all the old poems, to be sure, there is a Kundry, some of whose characteristics Wagner has borrowed. But essentially she is his own—a type of the eternal temptress, and yet a Magdalen.

Another thing to note is that Wagner rejects Wolfram's account of the origin of the Grail—the actual wonder-working vessel. According to Wolfram, sixty thousand angels who wished to expel God from heaven made a crown for Lucifer. When Michael, the archangel, struck it from Lucifer's head, a stone fell to the earth. This became the Holy Grail, which was given in charge to Titurel and his dynasty of the Grail kings. How much more poetic and touching Wagner's idea is need not be said. In his hands, in short, the old, old legend assumes a wonderfully concentrated form, exhibiting as never before the drama of the world's sin and pain, its cause and cure.

FIRST ACT

THE curtain opens to disclose a woodland glade near the Castle of Monsalvat, in the northern mountains of Gothic Spain. Gurnemanz, one of the Knights of the Holy Grail, and two of his young squires are stretched in slumber under a tree. From the unseen castle, temple of the Grail, the dawn of day is announced by the solemn music of trumpets and trombones. The sleepers start up, and fall on their knees, to breathe a silent morning prayer. This over, Gurnemanz sends his esquires to make ready the bath for Amfortas, the sick king, guardian of the Grail.

Amfortas had been wounded under circumstances which must here be related. Near Monsalvat dwells the magician Klingsor. He represents the power of evil, and his enchanted castle, looking towards Moorish Spain, is the abode of temptation. He had been refused admission to their "order" by the Knights of the Grail, and, in revenge, he tries to corrupt them, chiefly by a company of lovely girls, women of "diabolical beauty," as Gurnemanz says. To the allurements of one of these sirens Amfortas had once succumbed; with the result that he lost

the sacred lance which pierced the Saviour's side, and was wounded by it—he, too, in the side. The wound can be healed only by a touch of the lance which caused it. But the lance is in the keeping of Klingsor, who, armed with it, can attack even the holy knights, and hopes some day to obtain possession of the Grail itself.

Well, to resume, Amfortas is ill, and Gurnemanz is inquiring anxiously after his health from two knights who have just entered. The king is no better. Presently the talk is interrupted by the appearance of Kundry, the wildest but most potent character in the drama, who bolts in with a rare healing balsam for the king, which she has ridden to Arabia to find. Wagner thus indicates her appearance: "In wild garb fastened high with a hanging girdle of snakes' skins; black hair, flowing in loose tresses; dark brown, reddish complexion, piercing black eyes, at times flaming wildly, but oftener fixed as in death." At this point the wounded king appears for a moment, pale and feeble: borne on a litter on his way to bathe in the lake.

Kundry, refusing to be thanked for her futile assistance, crouches down sullenly, like a hunted wild beast. The young esquires tease her, and hint that she is bewitched; which indeed she is, though only when under the evil influence of Klingsor. This mysterious, conflicting, tempestuous character, it should be observed, is none other than that

Herodias who demanded and obtained the head of John the Baptist, and was doomed to eternally wander the earth in consequence. Wagner, however, represents her crime as that of laughing at our Saviour on the Cross, her punishment being to traverse the world under a curse of laughter, praying always for the gift of tears to relieve her weary soul. When not dominated by the demoniac power of Klingsor, she is entirely on the side of the ministers of the Grail. But, in scriptural language, "the evil that she would not, *that* she does."

She is defended now by Gurnemanz, who proceeds, in several long speeches, to tell the young esquires the story of the Grail. After this they repeat together the oracular utterance according to which the suffering Amfortas can be healed only by the mediation of a guileless fool enlightened by pity. A weird interruption occurs while they are speaking. Loud cries are heard without, and a wounded swan, one of the sacred birds of the Grail, flutters to the stage with an arrow through its breast. Knights and esquires rush in, dragging with them the murderer, as they call him, bow in hand—"a strange youth who does not even know his own name." Gurnemanz shows impatience at his stupidity. "A dolt so dull I never found, save Kundry here," he says.

The youth, who is none other than Parsifal, has lived all his life in the woods. His innocence pre-

sently strikes Gurnemanz in a new light. What if *this* should be the "guileless fool" of the prophecy, the promised Deliverer? With that idea in his mind, he leads Parsifal to the Castle of the Grail, the whole way to which is shown by an elaborate panorama, a masterpiece of scenic illusion.[1] In the great domed hall of the Grail, the knights assemble, entering in line while singing a solemn unison chant. Amfortas is brought in and laid on a couch before the altar, in the centre of the hall, followed by a procession bearing a crimson-draped shrine containing the Grail, which they set down in front of the king.

The wretched sufferer—the one sinner in the whole brotherhood of the Grail—implores in piteous tones that his task of uncovering the sacred chalice, source to him of bitter remorse and anguish, may be waived. But Titurel, his father (the original guardian of the Grail), speaking from the grave, where his life is just sustained by the marvellous potency of the Grail, bids Amfortas perform the sacred office. Amfortas accordingly, while protesting his unworthiness, lifts the crystal vase, and

[1] Regarding this Wagner wrote: "The unrolling of the moving scene, however artistically carried out, was emphatically not intended for decorative effect alone; but, under the influence of the accompanying music, we were, as in a state of dreamy rapture, to be led imperceptibly along the trackless ways to the Castle of the Grail; by which means, at the same time, its traditional inaccessibility, for those who are not called, was drawn into the domain of dramatic performance."

the rites of the Blessed Sacrament are celebrated. Shortly after, Amfortas' wound again bursts forth, and he is carried away senseless, only Gurnemanz and Parsifal remaining on the stage.

From the first agonising cry of Amfortas, Parsifal has stood stupefied and motionless, watching the whole scene from the side. In answer to Gurnemanz's somewhat testy inquiry whether he understands what he has seen, he only shakes his head vacantly. Thereupon Gurnemanz, angry with disappointment, unceremoniously thrusts him from the hall, saying as he slams the door: "Leave thou our swans for the future alone, and seek thyself, gander, a goose."

SECOND ACT

The rising of the curtain reveals Klingsor's magic Castle of Perdition. The sorcerer, sitting in his laboratory—a sort of Faust-like chamber—amid the mysterious necromantic implements of his unholy craft, becomes conscious that Parsifal, the "pure fool," is approaching his domain. By his infernal incantations he summons Kundry (the "she-devil," the "rose of hell," as he calls her) to his side. In the previous Act Kundry had been thrown into a hypnotic sleep by that same evil power which here dominates her again. Now she arises in a cloud of violet vapour to receive the magician's commands.

The order is that she must use all her seductive arts against Parsifal, now nearing the castle. In vain she protests: Klingsor's malignant power is paramount. Looking over the ramparts, he describes how he sees Parsifal routing the feeble, enslaved knights who guard the castle, and forcing an entrance. Peremptorily he dismisses Kundry to her task of fell destruction, and the scene changes to the garish garden of the castle, with its wealth of wonderful tropical flowers, unearthly in their hue and splendour. Troupes of houris, half-clad, pour in from all sides. Parsifal appears on the walls, gazing rapturously on the enchanting scene, lost in amazement. The maidens first assail him with reproaches; then, to ravishing music, coax him with their most seductive cajoleries. "If you do not love and caress us, we shall wither and die," they cry. Parsifal, not relishing their attentions, struggles to free himself.

While he is thus engaged, a voice from a flowery thicket near by calls, "Parsifal! stay!" The youth is deeply moved, bewildered. This name is to him but a faint remembrance of his mother having once murmured it in a dream. The network of flowers is unravelled, and Kundry appears: not the swarthy, dishevelled, eerie witch of the First Act, but "a beautiful siren arrayed in floating drapery—a very Venus." Reclining on a bank of flowers, she dismisses the nymphs, and again implores Parsifal to

stay. She seeks to engage his interest by recounting to him the story of his origin, dwelling particularly on his mother's woes and death. Parsifal's heart is touched; he is distracted by sorrow and remorse.

> My mother! my mother! could I forget her?
> Ah! must all be forgotten by me?
> What have I e'er remembered yet?
> But senseless folly dwells in me!

The wily temptress urges the claims of love as a panacea for these pangs of the heart. Drawing the unsophisticated youth towards her, she presses her lips upon his in "a long, long kiss." Instantly the "guileless fool" springs up, maddened and terrified. The touch of defilement has "wakened him to a sense of human frailty." He seems to suffer intense pain, physical and mental. He recalls the anguished cry of the ailing Amfortas, which now becomes plain to him. His sympathy with Amfortas has made him wise unto salvation. His eyes are opened to know good and evil. "Amfortas! The wound! the wound! It burns within me too," he exclaims, awakening to a realisation of his mission.

This that has happened to him, this submission to the blandishments of woman, is, he feels, what must have been the undoing of Amfortas. No sensation of sensual pleasure vibrates through his frame. Kundry, pouring out the tale of her curse, her sin, and her sorrow, makes an impassioned appeal

for pity and love; but he puts her away from him with an impatience born of horror. "Away, unholy woman!" he cries. Frenzied with rage and despair, the sorceress curses him and his mission. In a final burst of passion at her defeat, she calls upon Klingsor to come to her aid.

Answering her summons, the magician appears upon the castle steps, brandishing the sacred spear. If Parsifal will not be subdued otherwise, *that* must be requisitioned. Klingsor hurls the spear at the intruder's head. But, lo!—a miracle—it floats harmless in the air, suspended above the intended victim. Parsifal grasps the weapon, and, making with it the sign of the Cross, he bids the Castle of Klingsor disappear. Immediately a cataclysm ensues. The whole place, garden and all, falls to ruins. Kundry drops senseless; and as the curtain descends, Parsifal, standing on the shattered ramparts, addresses her sternly in the prophetic, sinister words: "Thou knowest where only we shall meet again."

THIRD ACT

Many years have passed before the curtain rises on the idyllic landscape of this, the Third Act. The guardians of the Grail have fallen upon evil times. Amfortas, in his longing for the release of death, has ceased to uncover the sacred cup; and

the Knights of the Grail, thus deprived of their miraculous nourishment, are sunk in dejection and withered with age. Titurel, no longer strengthened by the Grail, is dead—really dead—and Gurnemanz, now a white-haired, sorrowful old man, lives as a hermit in a forest hut.

There, one spring morning, hearing groans near by, he tears the bramble growth away, and discovers the body of Kundry, clad in a penitent's coarse garb, cold and rigid, as if dead. He chafes her to life once more, and, moaning "Service! service!" she placidly resumes her work as a servant of the Grail. While Gurnemanz is contemplating this phenomenon, a knight in coal-black armour, with visor down, and bearing the sacred spear, approaches. It is Parsifal, a grown man now, weary and worn with the strife of the world.

Gurnemanz, amazed, recognises him. Parsifal relates how he has wandered and wandered vainly in search of Monsalvat; how he has ever carried the spear in his hand, though forbidden to use it, and so has suffered countless defeats and distresses. Now he has but one desire—to get back to Monsalvat and free Amfortas from his afflictions. Gurnemanz sympathises with his wish, but before conducting him to Monsalvat, he and Kundry remove his armour (for it is Good Friday, when no Christian knight must bear arms) and bathe his feet in the brook. Kundry then takes a phial of ointment from her bosom, and,

Magdalen-like, pours its contents on his feet, which she afterwards wipes with her hair. Gurnemanz anoints Parsifal's head and blesses him, and then he, in his turn, sprinkles Kundry with water and baptizes her in the name of the Redeemer.

At last Kundry is redeemed by love from her eternal curse. She sheds exquisite tears of joy at her deliverance. The three then set out for Monsalvat, where the knights have assembled for Titurel's funeral. Amfortas on his litter, the Grail in its shrine, and Titurel in his coffin are carried in. A last appeal is made to Amfortas (more weary and despairing than ever) to resume his office and uncover the sacred chalice. Amfortas expostulates, his agony at its apex. He springs to his feet, and tearing open his dress, shrieks:

> Behold me! The open wound behold!
> Here is my poison—my streaming blood.
> Take up your weapons! bury your sword-blades
> Deep—deep in me to the hilts!
> Ye heroes, up!
> Kill both the sinner and his pain:
> The Grail's delights will ye then regain.

The knights stand by, transfixed with awe. Parsifal enters, accompanied by Gurnemanz and Kundry. Pointing to his spear, Parsifal solemnly observes that only *that* can stay the flow of the rent in the king's side. With a touch of the weapon he heals the wound. Then, taking his place, he un-

veils the Holy Grail, and bends before it in silent adoration.

A sacred glow illumines the mystic vessel; and while Parsifal swings it gently from side to side, in token of benediction to the pardoned Amfortas and the ransomed Kundry, a white dove, emblem of the Divine Spirit, descends from the dome and hovers over his anointed head. And so, with voices from the middle and extreme heights, singing softly,

> Wondrous work of mercy!
> Salvation to the Saviour!

this noble and impressive mystery-music-drama ends.

THE HISTORY

"PARSIFAL" was Wagner's last music-drama. Yet the subject had occurred to him as early as 1857, when he was gathering the materials for "Tannhäuser" and "Lohengrin." This was twenty-six years before his death. "Wagner told me in 1877," says Professor Tappert, "that in the fifties, when in Zurich, he took possession of a charming new house, and that, inspired by the beautiful spring weather, he wrote out that very day the sketch of the Good Friday music."

The text of the work was completed in the early part of 1877, and was published in December that year. Wagner was sixty-five when he started to write the music. He finished the First and Second Acts in 1878, and the Third Act in 1879, and completed the instrumentation at Palermo in the January of 1882, only eleven months before his end came.

The first performance took place at Bayreuth on July 26, 1882; and as the copyright is still (1908) held by the Wagner family, "Parsifal" has not yet been heard elsewhere, with the single exception of New York (1903), the European copyright not being operative in America. Wagner objected to "Parsifal"

being given except at Bayreuth. When impresario Neumann, in 1882, asked to be allowed to include the latest music-drama in his European "Ring" *tournée*, Wagner answered him thus: "'Parsifal' cannot be played elsewhere than at Bayreuth for particular reasons which seemed so convincing to my august patron, the King of Bavaria, that he gave up the idea of a replica of the Bayreuth performances at the Munich theatre. I cannot authorise a performance on any stage, unless a real Wagner Theatre is established—a Festival Theatre which, reduplicated by propaganda, would spread through the whole world fully and faithfully what I have done in my Bayreuth theatre." In another letter he said that performances of "Parsifal" would be restricted to the "Bühnenweifestspiel"—a word which may be translated freely as "a festival that consecrates the stage."

This translation emphasises to many Wagnerians "the inadvisability—to use no stronger term—of performing 'Parsifal' in any but a theatre specially devoted to such performances; set apart, as is the Bayreuth Festival House, from the busy haunts of men, and necessitating something in the nature of a pilgrimage to reach it." Such a view can hardly be accepted. Thousands of earnest music-lovers, lovers especially of Wagner, cannot go to Bayreuth. Why should they be prevented from hearing "Parsifal"? There is more than a suspicion that Wagner's pro-

hibition was prompted as much by considerations of finance as of art. But, however that may be, it is pleasing to reflect that the coming expiry of the copyright will frustrate his attempt to make "Parsifal" a sort of preserve of the elect. Of course, it is by no means certain that "Parsifal" will be staged in England. It will assuredly not be staged without protest. Biblical and sacred subjects have been banished from the British stage since the days of the miracle play. But the impressions admittedly conveyed by the Oberammergau Passion Play show that the stage may yet prove as much of a power in sacred things as the pulpit; and there is no reason why the point should not be tested in England with "Parsifal."

England has at any rate had the keenest interest in "Parsifal" from the first. A detailed analysis of the score was printed in a leading musical journal in the summer of 1882, about the date of the first performance at Bayreuth. In that analysis appeared the following significant passage:

> We would pause to remark upon the extraordinary attention which a work of this composer now commands. The libretto was written and published in 1877, when a large edition was immediately sold; the music was only completed a few weeks ago, yet musicians have eagerly striven for a sight of it before publication, and two full analytical accounts have appeared in German papers, while a minute thematic guide by Herr von Wolzogen and some drawing-room arrangements by J. Rubinstein have been for some little time before the public, the vocal score

being only just now, as we write these words, completed. Not only this, but nearly three months before the production at Bayreuth photographs of the scenery and dresses are being sold.

What a triumph for the genius who thirty years before that could not gain a hearing anywhere!

THE MUSIC

One hesitates to write about the music of "Parsifal" without having actually heard it. It is rash to judge any composer merely by the written notes, and it is peculiarly rash in the case of Wagner. Taking, however, the score itself and placing it alongside the printed impressions of those who have been fortunate enough to hear the work at Bayreuth, one cannot well go far astray in attempting a few brief notes.

It is certainly safe to say, at the outset, that in "Parsifal" the music is everything. The libretto has been described as "a farrago of odds and ends, the very dust-bin of Wagner's philosophies, beliefs, vegetarian, anti-vivisection, and other fads." It does, indeed, smell of the lamp. It lacks spontaneity and dramatic "go." Nothing happens for several hours —nothing but discourses, philosophical and retrospective. Yet the glorious music carries it all off: floats this inorganic medley on its great waves of sound, making the listener forget entirely the imperfections of the "book."

Music has not known such fervour since the days of Palestrina. A holy and solemn grief pervades

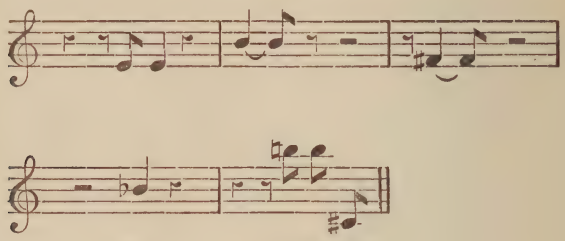
it. We seem to be constantly reminded of the great tragedy of Calvary. Wagner wrote once to Liszt: "In all my relations to the suffering world, I feel led and guided by one thing alone—compassion." And, listening to this fascinating, luxuriant, mellow, soothing music, it would really seem as if compassion had been the one thought in the composer's mind all through. "The muted pauses, the golden stream of tone, and the almost miraculous musicianship fill the listener with awe," writes one who has been at Bayreuth. Much has been said of the "miraculous musicianship," of the deft way in which Wagner has here, as elsewhere, woven his thematic material. The score is indeed built up in a masterly fashion; but the dramatic influence of the music is so overpowering that all thought of the technical side of the work may be entirely dismissed. The "mood pictures" are the really potent factors.

The First Act, like the last, partakes somewhat of the nature of a grand Communion service, the music being rich and tender, and charged with a noble passion. The short orchestral Prelude, a favourite concert number, attunes the mind to the fundamental thoughts of the drama. Here the principal "motives" which recur throughout are enunciated: among others the Love and the Grail themes, and the Saviour's Lament theme, which contains some of the most poignant bars Wagner ever wrote. In the last part of the Act a profound impression is made

by the clangour of the cathedral bells, at first heard faintly, then working up to a grand peal. The choral music and the "tonal panorama" of boys' voices are particularly fine, Wagner having here emulated with striking success the service of Rome. The Sorcery motive arrests by its Chopin-like chromatics; and when Parsifal enters we hear again the Swan motive from "Lohengrin"—a fine conception.

The sensuous beauty of the Second Act, devoted to the presentation of the working of the evil element, is in marked contrast to the First and Third Acts. It is full of rich, luscious melody, dance-like in form and colour, and "asking nothing of the hearer but self-relaxation." The Prelude, again short, is of a passionate, stormy, almost sinister nature, and is based chiefly on the Klingsor and Kundry themes heard in the previous Act. The crowning scene of this Second Act—perhaps of the whole work—is the duet between Parsifal and Kundry. Herein "the entire gamut of passion, maternal, exquisite, voluptuous, is traversed by a master hand." So, too, with the wonderful choral scene for sopranos only in the lovely magic garden of Klingsor's castle. This is written in as many as eighteen separate groups, and frequently in twelve real parts. Its sweet, plaintive melody and graceful rhythm cannot escape notice; any more than the enchanting waltz and Kundry's tender recital of the woes and sufferings of Parsifal's mother, and the *glissando* passage of the harps

(through two octaves) to express the act of hurling the spear at Parsifal's head. One phrase of Kundry's description of her sin and punishment has been often cited as the most astonishingly unvocal specimen in all Wagner's writings:



No wonder an early critic remarked that the singers' parts are peculiarly trying and thankless!

In the Third Act the gloom deepens to an almost distressing degree. Yet there is some glorious music in it; notably the Good Friday music, also familiar in the concert-room. The Prelude is again short. Its vague rhythm and darkly-tinted intricate harmonies are probably to be taken as illustrating the blind wanderings of Parsifal in search of Monsalvat. The last scene is gorgeously led up to—a fitting close to the great life-work of the last of our really great composers of the nineteenth century.

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